THE STORY OF PAINTING II

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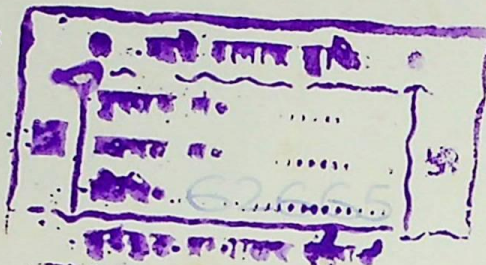
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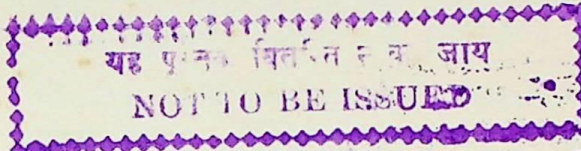
Introduction

by Bernard L. Myers

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THE PAINTER can show us our familiar world of mundane reality in a new light. He can show it to us through his own eyes, and endow it with a freshness, or a strange mystery, or a new critical clarity that not only refreshes our own vision but also makes us think and care about our everyday world anew.

The painter not only reflects the people and things and places of the actual world, but can show us and give life to his inner world. He can give his imagination the same reality that we recognise in the actual world, and affect and stimulate our own imagination. Here painting really does enter the world of ideas, and although we can enjoy the painter's skill in drawing, his portrayal of form and his use of pattern and colour, these alone are not sufficient. In allegorical painting the painter expects us to read and understand his story or his message. A myth is not just a fairy tale for amusement, but instruction as well, and mythology has and still does play a large part in the visual arts.

The painter can try to paint his vision of an ideal world, a super world with his idea of what ought to be rather than what is. Or he can criticise and attack that of which he disapproves in his fellow men, by caricature and distortion, by satire and sarcasm; sometimes more powerful than volumes of critical or political writing. Here satire finishes with its target, but fine painting remains long after the events which inspired it. Knowledge of these events adds to our understanding and therefore to our enjoyment of such works.

Pop Art has a strange ambiguous relationship with the world of mass culture and mass media. It is difficult to know whether the " pop " painters are admiring or attacking both the culture and the society which produces it. Is it an enthusiastic acceptance of the mechanical mass produced environment that causes them to them to paint pictures using the

crude imagery of the gaming machine or the juke box, or a compulsion to compete against it?

Ideas are not only those of the dream world, or of criticism and protest. The artist uses the ideas and language of optical studies and research in Op Art; the ambiguous world of the optical illusion.

These questions and ideas are some of the subjects discussed in this, the second of three volumes on The Story of Painting.

A garden painted on a wall

Festive and impersonal, decorative painting at its best gives rhythm and life to a large area of wall-space. It can extend the work of the architect by changing a room's apparent size.

THE PREHISTORIC MEN who painted bison, buffaloes and reindeer on the walls of their caves were not decorating their homes. They painted for magical and religious reasons. But the skill with which they could seize on an irregularity in the rock wall to enhance the picture suggests that they already had an eye for decorative effect.

Basically, however, the tradition of decorative painting began in ancient Greece and Rome. Of the Greeks, we know from authors of the time (such as the historian Pliny the Younger) that they made paintings of two kinds: paintings on walls and portable panels. Unfortunately, only the descriptions remain, but the frescoes which survive in Etruscan tombs give some idea of what Greek painting looked like. One example, the wrestlers from the 'Tomb of the Augurs' at Tarquinia closely resemble designs found on Greek vases of the same date – the sixth century BC.

The artist made little attempt to represent the wrestlers in depth. The figures are silhouettes, and their activity flows across the wall in a rhythmic line.

The Romans inherited the Greek tradition, and we know much more about their painting because many specimens have survived. Roman frescoes differ in kind. In some, we seem to glimpse the Greek masterpieces which are lost to us. Others show us what must be purely 'Roman' subjects: boxers, gladiators, charioteers and their horses, and dancing-girls. Others are architectural, with painted columns and 'windows' through which various scenes appear.

In the House of Livia

One of the best known, and certainly one of the most beautiful, of all the illusions which the Poman artists conjured up, is the garden scene from the 'House of Livia' in Rome. Here the plants and flowers fade away into a misty distance which suggests that the room is much larger than it is. This garden on the wall expresses the role of decorative painting. It suggests to us, for instance, that decorative painting does not have to be 'about' anything in particular; that its real job is to act as a kind of adjunct to architecture, or as an extension to what the architect can do.

On this definition, the great religious frescoes of the Middle Ages, such as those

To transform a blank wall into a decorative work of art, the painter must create an overall rhythm of design. Decorative painting began among the ancient Greeks and Etruscans. The Etruscan tomb-painting of two wrestlers, *above,* dates from the sixth century BC. *Below,* Livia, wife to the Roman emperor Augustus, could enjoy two worlds at once when she entered this room in her house: the real space on this side of the wall, and the magical garden beyond.

by Giotto and his assistants at Assisi, are to be counted as decorations. Yet often, when we look at some of the greatest work produced by the medieval religious tradition, such as the fourteenth-century frescoes in the mosque of Kariye Çami in Istanbul, we are aware of how much they owe to the Classical tradition. The late Byzantine paintings in Kariye Çami have a wildness and a spiritual force which make them quite different from the art of Pompeii, yet the way in which the space is used, the way in which the pictures make us aware of space as something active – these remind us of the continuity of the Classical tradition.

In addition to this, there also grew up a charming Gothic decorative style, adapted to secular purposes. We see it brilliantly used in a famous series of tapestries, the 'Lady and the Unicorn' tapestries, which now hang in the Musée Cluny in Paris. Decorative painting not only enhances our feeling for space, but brings with it an air of festivity.

With the coming of the Renaissance, there was a great revival of interest in the idea of decorative art. Quite apart from the frescoes that survive, such as those by Mantegna (1431–1506) in the palace at Mantua, many paintings were commissioned to be incorporated in decorative or architectural schemes. Uccello's picture of the *Rout at San Romano* now in the National Gallery, London, is one example.

Frescoes of the fourteenth century AD, from the mosque of Kariye Cami in Istanbul, owe much to Classical thinking.

Another is the series of *Triumphs* by Mantegna, which are now at Hampton Court. These sadly damaged, but still impressive paintings are evidently based upon the artist's study of Roman sculpture.

Later, as the Renaissance developed, artists turned to other and still more authentic sources. The frescoes in the 'Golden House' of Nero discovered buried under the Palatine in Rome, exercised an immense influence over the artists of the early sixteenth century, and on none more than Raphael (1483–1520), then at work in the Vatican.

The 'grotesque' style (from the Italian 'Grotteschi', fantastic ornaments discovered on walls in classical grottoes) of decoration, as employed here by Raphael and his team of assistants, was to have an enduring influence in European art. Ornamental designers of all kinds, and not merely fresco painters, made use of it, and one can see it still at work within the capricious decorations of the Rococo.

The next two centuries were to be those in which the decorative painter reigned supreme. If Mantegna stands at the beginning of the Renaissance, it is Annibale Carracci (1560–1609) who comes at its conclusion. Carracci was the first great painter of the Baroque, and the frescoes which he and his brother Agostino (1557–1602) painted in the Palazzo Farnese in Rome were to give a new direction to art.

During the course of the sixteenth century, fresco painting had been carried to a height of sublimity, which it was never to reach again, by Michelangelo in his paintings for the Sistine Chapel. It had also developed an immense array of technical devices, many of them stemming originally from the workshop of Raphael.

The rooms of Versailles

Raphael and Michelangelo between them were the parents of Roman Mannerism, and mannerist decorative painting was the foundation on which Annibale Carracci based his art. But it seems clear that he found the characteristic mannerist devices – the tricks with perspective, the distortions of scale – somewhat undigni-

Annibale Carracci's vast scheme for the Farnese Palace, Rome, covered the ceiling of a gallery 66 feet long and 22 feet wide with mythological scenes — among them the triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne. Artists throughout Europe took Annibale's work as a standard for decorative art.

fied. What he set out to produce, in the great gallery of the palazzo, was a perfectly unified decorative scheme, something solemn yet festive, which made full use of the contrasts between illusion and reality (for example, some figures painted to resemble statuary, and some to resemble life) without upsetting his own or the spectator's sense of decorum. The result was undoubtedly impressive, and it created a new kind of official art, a standard which was gladly accepted by the whole of Europe.

We can see Annibale's influence particularly in Flanders and in France – in the work which Charles Le Brun (1619–90) did at Versailles for Louis XIV, and in the cycle of paintings Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) made at a somewhat earlier date for Louis's grandmother, Marie de Médicis. Exuberant as Rubens's work is, this 'official' side also made it seem pompous to the next generation of artists. The revolt against formality in painting was matched by a revolt, among patrons, against the demands of etiquette.

One of Rubens's most passionate admirers was the young Frenchman, Antoine Watteau (1684–1721). Watteau made innumerable drawings after the older master's compositions. He was nevertheless the representative of a new age. His training came from a different sort of decorative tradition from that practised by Rubens and his peers – and a much humbler one.

His first master, Claude Audran, was an interior decorator, as we should call it, rather than a painter, and Watteau to the end of his life retained traces of the techniques which Audran taught him – for example, his trick of mixing varnish with his paint.

But it was Watteau's tone – his ideals as a painter – rather than his actual achievements as a decorator which carried the most weight. In his *Fêtes Champêtres* Watteau represented a world which was strictly private – a world of fantasy and

Antoine Watteau's fragile lovers share an eighteenth-century screen with fanciful motifs that echo their mood.

dream, without specific meaning, but full of poetic suggestiveness. The patrons who relished his work did not like the formal rooms of their fathers. At Versailles, for instance, the 'Grands Appartements' where the King's public life was lived, were now matched by a new suite of 'Petits Appartements', where things could be more informal. The decoration of these

harked back, very often, to Raphael's 'grotesques' and, in the rooms decorated just before the Revolution for Marie Antoinette, we find specific references to Pompeii.

The leading painters – Pater (1695–1736), Boucher (1703–70), Fragonard (1732–1806) – did not so frequently design whole rooms for their patrons, though they often provided pictures to be set into the carved or painted panelling. The world they depicted was light and frivolous, not to say licentious, in its tone.

True decoration is impersonal

Elsewhere in Europe, the change was not so radical. The great Venetian painter, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696–1770), enjoyed a success which spread throughout most of Europe. In many ways, Tiepolo reverts to the ideas of Mannerism – he is capricious, wilfully elegant, but still grandiose. What makes him specifically eighteenth century is his escapism. He aims to lead us into a sunnier, pleasanter world. The walls dissolve, and we find ourselves in the company of an idealized Antony and Cleopatra, whose life is all banquets and feasting.

Tiepolo is in many respects a key figure – the junction between the eighteenth century and the nineteenth. His talented son, Domenico Tiepolo (1727–1804) continued the family tradition (in fact, he and his father often worked together), but painted towards the end of his life some curious frescoes which show us the popular life of Venice, depicted in a much more matter-of-fact style than we might expect. Indeed what they remind us of most is the early work of Goya (1746–1828). And Goya himself was clearly influenced by the work which the Tiepolos did towards the close of their joint career, when they visited Spain.

Those Goyas which bear the closest resemblance to Tiepolo are the series of tapestry designs which he produced for the Royal Factory of Santa Barbara. In intention, these belonged to the artificial rustic world of Fragonard and Boucher. In fact, the rusticity is real – the pictures are awkward, but alive with Goya's own personal observation of life, and this perhaps destroys the impersonality which we expect of true decoration.

Goya's temperament was to precipitate him ever more violently along the road towards a wholly personal art, and it therefore seems doubly curious that the most impressive of his late works are the wall-paintings which he made for his own house – the so-called 'Casa del Sordo' – which are now in the Prado. These pictures are nightmare fantasies, an attempt to make the artist's dwelling as much a part of himself as his own body.

The dilemma posed by Goya's career was to haunt the whole of the succeeding century, and to some extent still haunts painters today. In France, for example, the school of Boucher and Fragonard had been succeeded by that of Jacques Louis David (1748–1825), and Neo-Classicism (which had in any case been gathering strength ever since the middle of the eighteenth century) was in ascendance. In its decorative aspect, Neo-Classicism was very much an art of formulae, and decorative painting suffered accordingly.

Enlivening a wall-space

Romanticism, despite its emphasis upon the painter's individuality, represented something of a reaction against this neglect of decoration. One of the most ambitious decorative schemes of the early nineteenth century is the series of paintings by Delacroix (1798–1863) for the Library of the Chambre des Députés in Paris. Perhaps even more than Watteau, Delacroix was haunted by Rubens, and these and his decorative paintings are an attempt to remake the baroque style of Rubens in the terms of his own day.

But decorative painting no longer lay at

The French Impressionists sought new ways to communicate the spirit of decorative art. But Auguste Renoir reflected the style of the eighteenth century in the dancer on the panel.

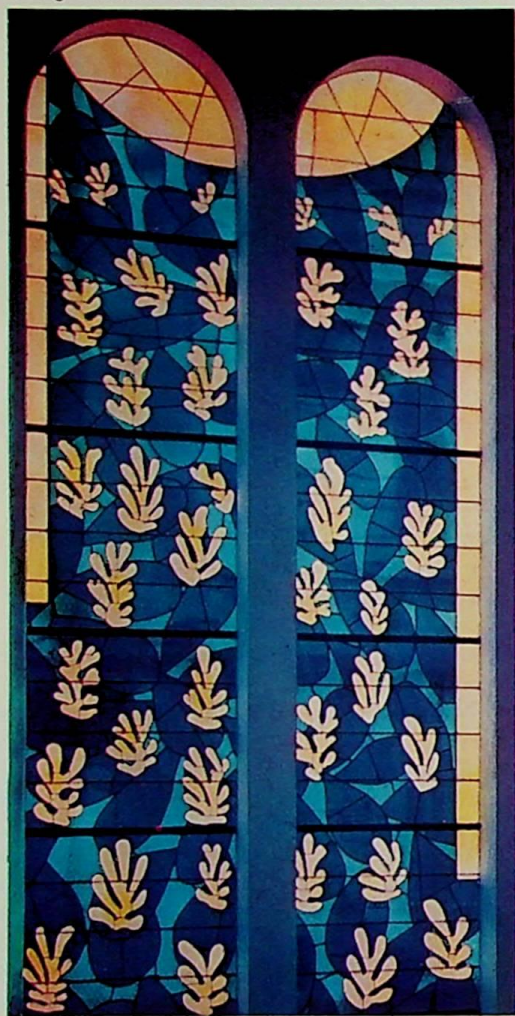
the very centre of art, as it had done for two centuries. We can see this in the various efforts made by the Impressionists to find a truly convincing decorative style. Renoir's (1841–1919) decorative panels, such as the pair of dancers in the National Gallery, London, show how intelligently the artist had studied the masters of the past, especially those of the eighteenth century. But they do not strike one as being his best works.

The two most successful decorative artists of the late nineteenth century – Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901) and Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947) – succeed because they are both primarily obsessed with the idea of style. As a poster-designer, and as an enthusiast for popular entertainments such as the circus and the Parisian dance-halls and *cafés chantants*, Lautrec had a living tradition to draw upon – and the poster was, in any case, in the course of becoming the decorative art of the masses. His decorative panels owe much to this popular tradition. Bonnard, like Toulouse-Lautrec, made a study of Japanese prints, and his early decorative work (which often uses a tall, thin format, with the shapes arbitrarily cut off by the edge of the picture) shows how much he learned from them.

As the new century began, it seemed as if decorative painting was to receive a new lease of life. Matisse's panel *La Danse*, now in Russia, is fully worthy to stand beside the great decorations of the past. But it was only Matisse who was to sustain the impetus. At the very end of his life he produced one of the simplest and most beautiful of all decorative schemes in the little chapel at Vence – a reconciliation of the demands of decoration and the quite different demands of religion worthy of comparison with the paintings in Kariye Cami.

The great panels made from cut and coloured paper which Matisse produced at the same period combined the essential qualities of decorative art – festivity,

impersonality, and the ability to create a rhythm which gives life to a large area of wall-space. There have been many

In the chapel at Vence, France, Matisse used design motifs alone for walls and windows.

(often self-conscious) twentieth-century attempts to create large decorative schemes, including Léger's (1881–1955) decorations for Cherbourg and Chagall's (b. 1887) ceiling for the Paris Opéra. Among the more successful is the series of tapestries designed by various leading artists for Jean Lurçat and woven at Aubusson, though most of them have too much the air of being woven pictures.

Decorative painting today

But the most curious turn of the wheel has taken place in recent years. Since the rise to eminence of the American Abstract Expressionist painters, paintings have grown steadily larger in format, often attaining to the size which the Baroque masters employed for important decorations. Jackson Pollock, Sam Francis and Mark Rothko lend a new lustre to the modern office block, and, upon those austere walls, undoubtedly fulfil some of the functions which le Brun fulfilled for his royal master at Versailles.

But the main reason for the large size, where Abstract Expressionist works are concerned, is that the painting serves as a kind of arena in which the painter's personal anguish acts out a drama. If Pollock is a decorator – a 'new Tiepolo', as a detractor called him – then this came about by accident. And it seems, in general, to be true that much contemporary art is decorative, or can be used as decoration, without this being its primary purpose. Every year, more and more people are able to buy pictures to decorate their homes. Amid such uncertainties of style and purpose, the future of decorative painting remains very much in doubt.

Why paint an allegory?

In order to point a moral, exalt a virtue, expose folly, celebrate or prophesy a great event, artists have often preferred to imply their subject by depicting another easily associated with it.

THE WHOLE STORY of art is bound up with symbolism. Whenever an artist wants to express an abstract idea – hope, victory, nationhood – he must resort to symbols. One of the earliest Egyptian carvings symbolizes the need for Upper and Lower Egypt to remain united, by showing a man being decapitated.

Allegory, although a kind of symbolism, is more literal and story-like. It has played a smaller part in art than symbolism, yet all the Middle Eastern civilizations seem to have found a place for it in religious and moral tales. It was an ideal way of representing complex ideas in simple terms which everyone could understand. The prophecies of the Old Testament and the parables of the New rely on allegory.

The allegorical form seems to have come to Greece with the mystery religions of the East, and thence into Christian art. The early Christians used symbols and allegories, partly under the pressure of persecution, but also as a convenient shorthand for the central mysteries of their faith.

Allegory flourished throughout the Middle Ages, especially in the form of ante-types in which various Old Testament events such as Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac, were seen as foreshadowing in an allegorical way the events of Christ's life and his Passion.

Pointing to a moral

These ante-types were seen as records of God's plan at work in history. Indeed, the architecture and decoration of entire Gothic churches can be explained in terms of allegorical schemes of the Universe, with the vault representing heaven. Not until the Renaissance, however, did allegory achieve a new importance in combination with historical painting.

The commemoration of great historical events was already one of the functions of art in the ancient Middle Eastern civilizations. It was usually connected with the glorification of the ruler of his dynasty and hence with war – as can be seen in the Assyrian reliefs from the Palace of Assurbanipal in the British Museum. Artists would often find it more appropriate to state their exalted message in terms of allegory.

During the Dark Ages there was little interest in representations of historical scenes, but it revived during the Middle

Ages – the Bayeux Tapestry depicting Harold of England and the Norman Conquest is an early example.

In fifteenth-century Italy came the Renaissance – a revival and re-interpretation of classical antiquity which was to sweep Europe and create a radically new outlook in almost every field of human endeavour.

Leon Alberti, the humanist and architect, laid down in 1435 that the painter should choose a subject of sufficient dignity to enable him to demonstrate all his skills. Themes from antiquity offered greater freedom in this regard than biblical subjects and put a classical education to good use. But it remained important that the picture should point to some moral.

In order to carry out their ennobling function, said Alberti, painters must be men of the highest calibre. They should mix with poets and orators, be learned in mathematics for perspective, in rhetoric for gesture, and in psychology for expression. They should be observers of nature for the accurate rendering of telling details, and they should be students of antiquity.

This was a considerable programme at a time when artists were tradesmen painting their madonnas and wedding-chests within the confines of a carefully regulated guild. We have seen that progress was in the air, yet it seems extraordinary that within a hundred years there really were artists who were treated as princes, and that Alberti's programme for historical painting can indeed serve us as a critical code for great painting of four centuries.

An important advance in the status of the artist was due to Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), the epitome of Renaissance Man. He was very good-looking, very well spoken, and a great success at the court of Ludovico Sforza, Duke of Milan. He excelled in everything he did and the fame of his projects spread all over Italy, even though many remained unfinished. His written notes on the art of painting were later to be of great importance. Both in his writings and his life he raised the level of importance of the artist, strengthening the artist's claim to be treated as the equal of the scholar.

Leonardo's paintings, however, do not reflect as much of Alberti's teaching as do Raphael's. Raphael painted his *School of Athens* in 1508–11 as part of a decorative

Raphael's *School of Athens* depicts Philosophy, with Plato and Aristotle in the centre. Some of the other figures are under the patronage of Apollo, god of intellect, and some under Minerva, goddess of wisdom.

scheme in the quarters of Pope Julius II in the Vatican. The subject is Philosophy, and this fits in well with the other walls, which show allegories of other aspects of truth such as Theology and Poetry.

Apollo and Bacchus

The philosophers deep in conversation in the centre are Plato and Aristotle, the former pointing upwards to indicate his concern with the Ideal, the latter demonstrating his interest in the natural sciences. The figures are divided into two groups, one apparently under the patronage of Apollo, god of the sun and intellectual inspiration, the other under Minerva, goddess of wisdom. Among them are contemporary figures, including Raphael himself on the far right.

It has been plausibly suggested that the picture contains a programme of reconciliation among opposing systems of philosophy, but the allegorical meaning is so elaborate that no one has been able to rediscover it completely. To some extent this is a problem which faces all allegory.

A simpler mystery lies in Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne*. This was painted in the 1520s as one of a series of mythological pictures ordered by Alfonso d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, to decorate his apartments. Ariadne, daughter of King Minos of Crete, helped Theseus to escape from the labyrinth and was abandoned by him on the Island of Naxos. She was found by the god Bacchus on one of his triumphal progresses and made his bride.

The theme allows full play to the painter's fantasy and feeling for poetry. To appreciate it, one must notice how beautifully he has brought alive the god's entourage – the nymphs, satyrs and leopards. He reminds us that the progress itself is symbolic of the intoxication and release of wild emotions which are associated with Bacchus.

Titian's source for the story must have been Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. From these verses it is evident that Bacchus is about to descend and reveal his love. Ariadne is reaching for her crown, which the god has transformed into the constellation of Hercules, as a wedding present.

Titian set new standards for mythological paintings. In his portrayal of *Bacchus and Ariadne*, the god is descending to reveal his love. Notice the artist's feeling for poetry and fantasy in his depiction of the leopards and nymphs in the god's entourage.

These verses were known to every educated man in the Renaissance. Alfonso and his court must have admired the way in which Titian has translated three brief lines into a brilliant painting. They read it as an allegory of the Triumph of Virtue.

Titian set the standards for this type of mythological allegory. It became immensely popular and covered a vast range of subject matter, from the seriously philosophic to the completely lighthearted, where there was very little moral and lots of voluptuous flesh. It allowed the painter to indulge his fantasy and skill, while the beholder could muster all his classical learning to interpret it.

Classical and Old Testament themes were used indiscriminately for these 'mythologies'. There were hundreds of themes in Ovid alone – Diana and Actaeon, Dido and Aeneas, the loves of Jupiter with Europa, Danaë, Io.

With the more popular themes, painters had soon to be conscious not only of the story but of the great versions by Titian, Tintoretto and Correggio. The supply of good stories was not endless, and works tended to become less original and increasingly variations on a theme. These were still produced in the nineteenth century, but of course they suffered from lack of vigour and originality.

The very idea of progress, which had led to such striking advances in the previous century, was now used as justification for rules deduced from the work of Leonardo, Raphael and Michelangelo, the masters of the Renaissance. Rules mean a system which is tidy and can be taught – the basis of all the Academies.

Apart from the endless stream of mythologies, the historical allegories were often used to glorify individual rulers or families, showing them either rising to heaven surrounded by figures representing their good qualities, or themselves in the guise of gods escorted by nymphs and cherubs.

An enchanting version of a myth, Tintoretto's *Origin of the Milky Way*. The infant Hercules is taken to Juno's breast, whose milk is transformed into stars.

The 'Grand Manner'

One of the finest examples is the ceiling of the Painted Hall at Greenwich by Sir James Thornhill (1675/6–1734). It shows William and Mary attended by the four cardinal virtues. Above the queen hovers Concord, while Peace offers the king an olive branch; he hands the Cap of Liberty to Europe and beneath his feet crouches Tyranny. These are references to his wars with Louis XIV. Below the group is Architecture with a drawing of Greenwich Hospital, and Time exposing Truth. The whole ceiling is an account of the deeds of the royal pair.

Often the best paintings flouted the rules. Veronese's *Marriage at Cana* is a masterpiece. The miracle of the water turned into wine is itself an allegory of one of the most solemn mysteries of the Christian faith – the meaning of the sacrament of Holy Communion, in which bread and wine are taken by Christians for the blood of Christ. It has been transformed into a splendid Venetian party. The double-bass player is Titian, Tintoretto plays the viola and Veronese himself the violoncello. Mary Queen of Scots and other celebrities are among the guests. The Church authorities were shocked at this irreligious treatment of a sacred subject.

Veronese got away with it; for lesser men there is much to be said for rules, especially when they are treated as guidelines.

In the seventeenth century, historical painting followed three main directions. Few could do what Velazquez did so bril-

Veronese's magnificent painting of *The Feast in the House of Levi* was originally known as *The Last Supper*. The artist's love of splendour and the introduction of such irreligious subjects as animals and soldiers got him into trouble with the Inquisition and the title was changed. *The Surrender of Breda* (1634), *right*, by Velazquez, is a victory picture recording an incident in the Dutch Wars of Independence.

liantly in the *Surrender of Breda* (1634), that is, to give a contemporary story the essential qualities of historical painting in a framework of realism which owes nothing to traditional principles.

Rubens's immense series (1622–5) celebrating the life of Marie de Médicis, in which we see real events transposed on to a plane of allegory in a riotous swirl of flesh and movement, is an example of the most popular type of Baroque allegory.

For Sir Joshua Reynolds, the eighteenth-century English painter, there were two

Rubens painted an immense series of pictures representing the life of Marie de Médicis. Here (detail), an example of the most popular type of Baroque allegory, we see her arrival at Marseilles to be crowned queen of France. She is greeted by nymphs symbolizing the city.

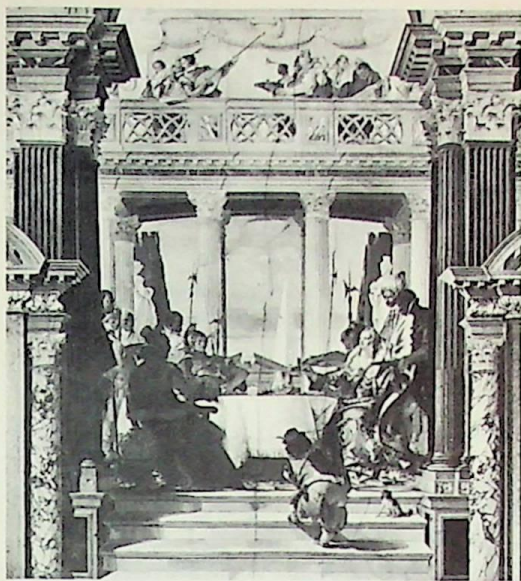
sorts of historical painting, the ornamental flowery sort descended from the Venetians and the austere serious manner which he preferred as the real 'Grand Manner'.

The most distinguished exponent of the 'Grand Manner' of historical painting was Poussin. Poussin saw the Roman god Bacchus as a fore-runner of Christ. In his painting *Arcadian Shepherds,* a group of shepherds in the idyllic land of Arcadia suddenly come upon a tomb on which they decipher the inscription *Et in Arcadia ego* – 'I, too, lived in Arcadia'.

An oath for the Republic

Are they hushed by the presence of death in this happy land, or should one take a more elegiac reading – the tomb of a poet who was once happy? In either case, the frailty of human happiness is the subject. Here is a painting whose meaning has not diminished.

In the eighteenth century the popularity of historical painting declined, although it remained entrenched in the Academies and in official patronage. The best painters preferred to work in more contemporary modes. Giovanni Battista Tiepolo's paintings give such an aristocratic impression because they belong to an art of grand gesture which was already out of date when he painted them. Hence they are cool and distanced, somewhat theatrical.

If this was the end of a great tradition, it was by no means the end of the story – both history and allegory were too close to Man's imaginative life to be abandoned. Besides, historical painting was still the official art. All professors at the French Academy had to be historical painters.

Tiepolo's *Banquet of Antony and Cleopatra* is one of the frescoes for the Palazzo Labia, Venice.

Inspired by the rediscovery of Pompeii and the writings of the German archaeologist Johann Winckelmann, the late eighteenth century saw a renewed appreciation of Classical art which led Jacques Louis David to produce his sensational *Oath of the Horatii* in 1785. In the story from Plutarch, the three brothers agree to meet their enemies in single combat in order to save Rome from general attack. For their sister, it means that either her brothers or her fiancé must die.

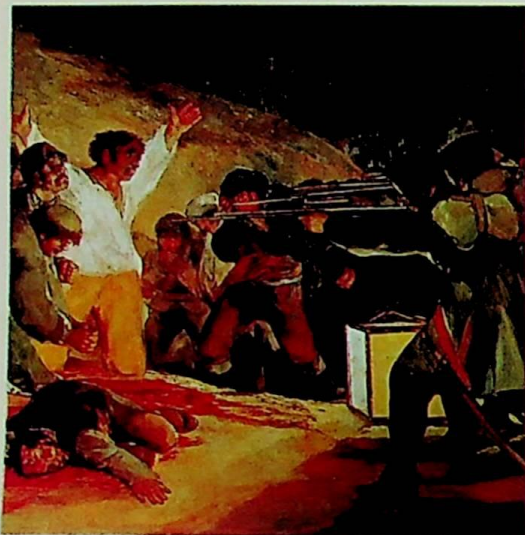
The moment chosen by David, their oath to do or die for the Republic, was politically loaded in the heated atmosphere preceding the French Revolution. Nevertheless, this is not enough to account for its tremendous reception, which at once made David a painter of the first importance. It was praised for its strength and simplicity, but above all for its subject-matter. Here was a moral lesson which even the simplest peasant could understand; it was a painting for the new age.

To us the *Oath* is somewhat cold and theatrical. The same is probably true of another attempt to bring history up to date, Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*. It was painted as a demonstration against the French government. He felt its faults were epitomized by the loss of the government frigate *Medusa* in 1816 and the subsequent horrors suffered by the survivors, mounting up to the moment when it seemed that the rescue ship would miss them. (It did, but returned later.)

Picasso's allegory of war

Géricault was dealing here with a painter's important problem – how to make a modern event heroic and monumental

The *Oath of the Horatii*, by David, made a sensation on its appearance just before the French Revolution. Three brothers resolve to meet their enemies in single combat and sacrifice themselves for Rome.

Géricault painted the *Raft of the Medusa* in 1819 after the loss of the frigate. He even visited morgues to get his details correct, a departure from the principles of historical painting. Goya's *Massacre on the Third of May, below,* which took place during the Napoleonic Wars, is a savage indictment of the brutality of the French troops and the atrocities of war.

without depriving it of its contemporary significance. As a Romantic he had deliberately broken all the rules of historical painting about restraint and decorum; he went to immense lengths to get his details accurate, visiting mortuaries and having an exact model of the raft made. The picture caused a great sensation at the time, yet the overall effect is unlikely to move us deeply.

The finest twentieth-century picture in the tradition is Picasso's *Guernica* (1936), inspired by the Spanish Civil War. It is an historical painting but its value as such depends on something more than its 'accuracy' as a document of what happened at Guernica. It is an important historical painting because of the greatness of its theme: it is an allegory of the 'massacre of the innocents' that has been a horrifying feature of modern war. *Guernica* may prove to be, temporarily at least, the end of the tradition, for Picasso's subsequent evocations of grand themes have failed to make the impact of this picture, despite his power as a painter.

The romantic vision

Reflecting a love of wild nature, a yearning after vanished epochs, a preoccupation with the violent and macabre, romantic painting transforms reality with the power of the imagination.

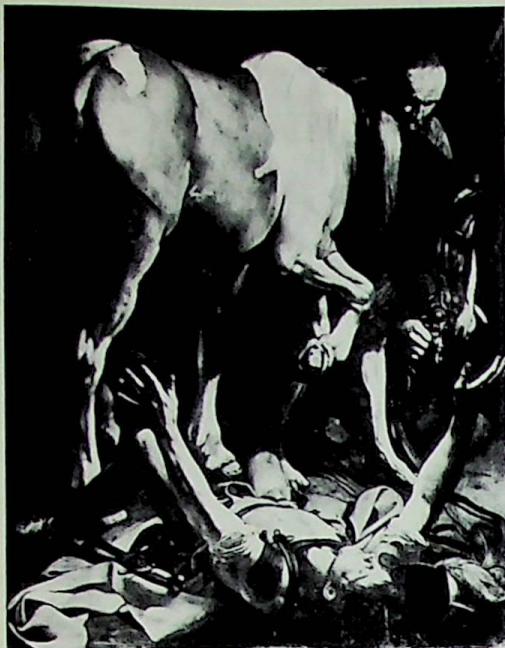
THE WORD 'ROMANTIC' as applied to painting stands for an urge towards free and imaginative expression rather than any one particular style or technique. It can be recognized in the artist's choice of subjects and the intensity of feeling brought to their realization, which may range from an exultation in force and power to a poetic melancholy. In this variety of emotional moods the desire for liberty is a recurrent theme, taking various forms.

The love of wild nature, mountains, waterfalls, forests and of the drama of storm, flood and fire is all part of the romantic longing. So too is the delight in scenes of human and animal violence, the rejection of the rational and the cultivation of the mysterious and the macabre. The yearning for vanished epochs is another aspect of the romantic mood, for these are endowed with a splendour denied to existing reality. In the treatment of such themes the romantic painter is subjective, projecting his own emotions on to the canvas.

The romantic spirit is not confined to one period. It may be found in the landscape painters of the Sung dynasty in China who, remote from court life, identified themselves with nature in the contemplation of misty mountain peaks. In Europe, its great period is specifically known as the Romantic Movement, dating roughly from 1780 to 1840, when circumstances combined to foster the romantic spirit in every shape.

From the sixteenth century onwards, during the changes that followed the Renaissance, there appeared artists who possessed one or other of the romantic traits. In Italy, Caravaggio (1573–1610) figured as a rebel against the outworn conventions of painting. His sombre themes and dramatic emphasis of light and shade reflect the intensity of his personality.

Rubens (1577–1640) was captivated by Caravaggio's force, and a romantic side of that many-sided genius found expression in his scenes of violent action, conveyed in pictures of imagined battles in the ancient world, of furious encounters between man and beast. His rearing stallions are the sires of those painted by the French Romantics Géricault (1791–1824) and Delacroix (1799–1863).

A nostalgia for the past, a philosophic melancholy induced by the ruins it had left, is a feature of the many paintings of

Caravaggio painted with a directness and simplicity unusual for his time, as we can see in his approach to *The Conversion of St Paul, left.* Another aspect of the romantic mood is the love of the past demonstrated in *The Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba* by Claude Lorrain, *below*.

the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Claude Lorrain (*c.* 1600–82), for example, depicts the architectural remains of ancient Rome, and reconstructs classical palaces and harbours often bathed in the light of dawn or sunset.

The noble war horse

The destructiveness of nature is a theme related to the decay of Roman arches and Corinthian columns. In the paintings of Salvator Rosa (1615–73) bandits or hermits are set against a background of frowning rocks and splintered tree-trunks evoking the craggy desolation of Calabria. Francesco Guardi (1712–93) turns his back

Delacroix, whose painting *Liberty Leading the People* is shown *above*, exemplifies the freedom of expression stimulated in all spheres by the French Revolution.

on the topographical realism of the Venetian school in his romantic fantasies suggested by the crumbling islets of the lagoon.

Many ideas and events produced the distinct phenomenon of 'Romanticism', a mood which for nearly three-quarters of a century pervaded all the arts. In the great political and social upheavals of the time, eighteenth-century rationality and order foundered in the storms and complexities of revolution.

The mood was first apparent in literature. The return to nature was heralded by the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) in France, and was a favourite theme of Wordsworth (1770–1850) in England. A new interest in the past was encouraged by the novels of Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832). Byron (1788–1824) spoke up for liberty in support of Greece, and described exotic Mediterranean scenes.

English poetry and drama, a revelation to the rest of Europe during this period, was also an inspiration to painters. For example, J.M.W. Turner (1775–1851) evolved a landscape from a description in Thomson's *Seasons* and when Delacroix painted Sardanapalus in barbaric majesty

on his funeral pyre it was after Byron's poem.

These literary influences were interwoven with those of actual events. The freedom expressed in the fantasies of William Blake (1757–1827) found a stimulus in the American and French Revolutions. The latter put an end to the decorative luxury of the painting patronized by the old regime, and the following Napoleonic wars gave rise to pictures in which the war horse played the same heroic role as in the canvases of Rubens.

The sinister colossus

This was not simply propaganda for war. The painting of Delacroix, the greatest of the French Romantics, is at once a creation and a criticism of violence. In the words of Baudelaire, in his essay on Delacroix in *Romantic Art*, it 'bore witness against the eternal and incorrigible barbarity of man'. Delacroix recognized in Rubens a force and vehemence appropriate to the troubled circumstances of his own time.

The bitterness of war has its testimony also in the work of Goya (1746–1828). His graphic series of *Disasters* is a grim condemnation of the atrocities that occurred during the French occupation of Spain. But more romantic in conception is the sinister phantom of *The Colossus*, a huge, dark symbol of calamity bestriding a sombre landscape in which small figures scatter in panic flight.

In this tremendous period of transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, it seems as if every gifted artist ran an emotional gauntlet from which none emerged unscathed. The youthful Goya who, in the 1770s, painted gay and animated scenes to be executed in tapestry, pictures of picnics, wine-harvests and flower girls, became, after 1808, the ruthless castigator of folly and evil, culminating in the horror reflected in the weird frescoes he painted towards the end of his

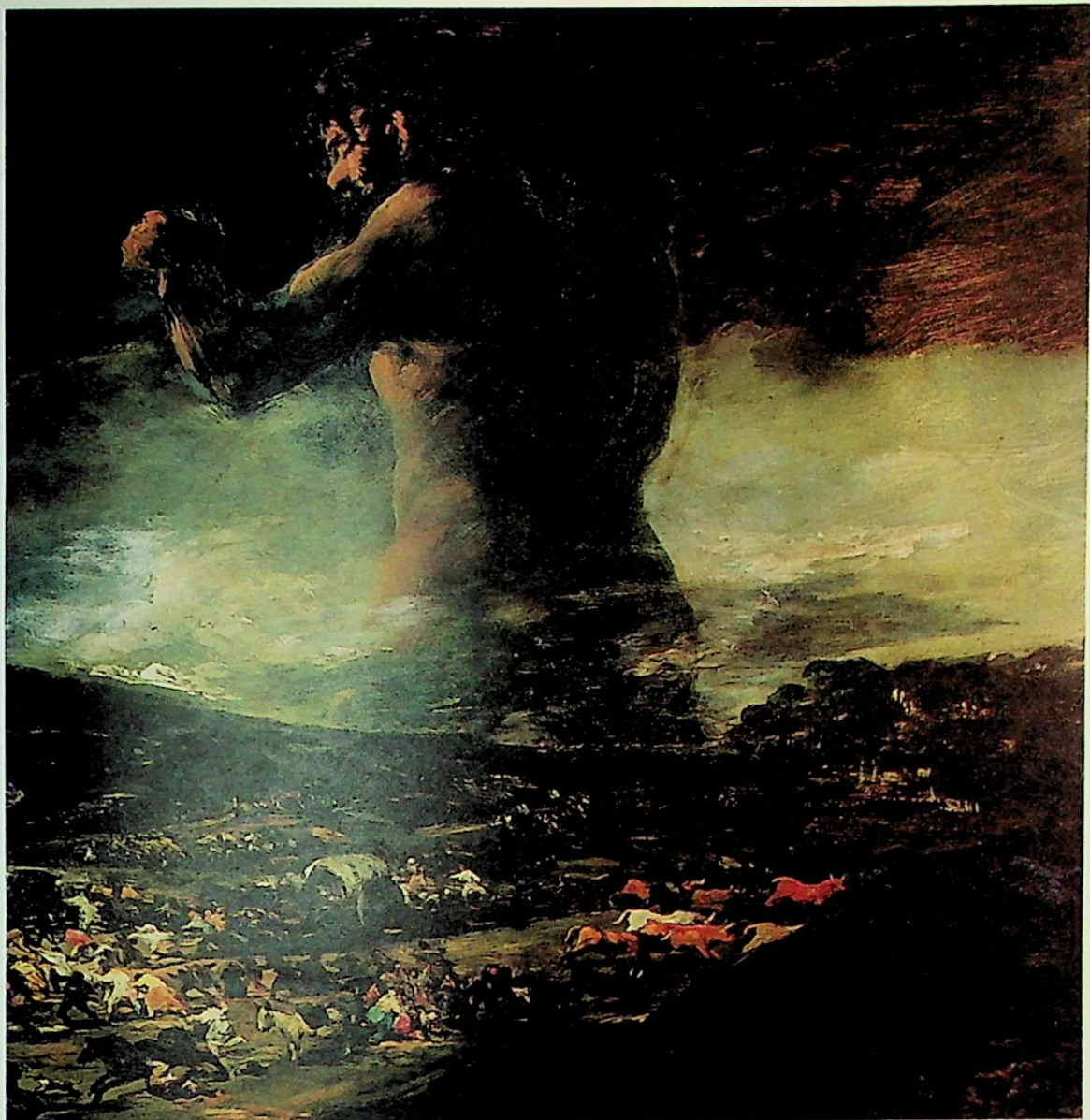
Right, the menacing figure of *The Colossus* by Goya towers above fleeing, panic-stricken figures. Goya had experienced the horror of war; this terrifying giant is a symbol of the brutality and violence of human nature.

life in his villa, outside Madrid. The young Turner who made picturesque watercolours became the painter of stupendous spectacles in which he opposed the superior violence of the elements to the puny efforts of human beings.

That there was a movement of escape in this fretful era is scarcely surprising, though it points to some of the weaker aspects of romantic art. The Middle Ages, so much scorned in the typical eighteenth-century view as a time of barbarism, now commanded an admiration composed of an interest in its architecture and costume and a respect for its spiritual ideals.

Earlier painters had taken historical themes, but had either given them some generalized classical character or else clothed them in the aspect of their own time. The romantic costume piece was a kind of fiction professing to represent the actual appearance and behaviour of historical personages at some dramatic or intimate moment.

This opened the way to an anecdotal form of painting without either historical or much aesthetic value. The salons and academies of the first half of the nineteenth century exhibited numerous examples (such as Delaroche's (1797–1856) *The Princes in the Tower* and *The Death of Queen Elizabeth*) which mark a romantic decadence.

The idea of a lost spiritual ideal was a different matter, the recapture of which was the aim of the German 'Nazarenes'. They were a group of artists, who, during the Napoleonic epoch, occupied a disused monastery at Rome and tried to combine asceticism of life with a return to the purity of religious art before the Renaissance had become full-blown. The attempt

to project themselves into the mentality of another time, and their efforts to revive the virtually obsolete craft of fresco, resulted in work that was cold and unreal.

Yet the thought of a perfection that existed once and might yet be rediscovered, haunted many romantic minds. It was so much a feature of the early nineteenth century, that the seeming opposition of two camps, the Romantic and the Classical, was an illusion. To return to the Middle Ages or to find inspiration in Classical antiquity was to pursue the same retrospective quest. To describe the art of Ingres (1780–1867), the determined Classicist and angry opponent of Delacroix, or

of the Neo-Classic sculptor John Flaxman (1755–1826) it has thus been found necessary to couple the opposite sounding terms, by calling them 'Classical Romantics'.

Goethe described the German *Nazarener* somewhat derisively as 'pre-Raphaelites', and the title was adopted by a young group of artist-rebels in England in 1848. By that date a new sense of realism was coming into art. Such was the complexity of their devotion, on the one hand to 'truth to nature' and on the other to a distant past, that one might be inclined to use another seeming contradiction by calling them 'realist-romantic', and the movement suffered through the confusion of its aims.

Henry Fuseli produced many paintings of a nightmarish quality, often inspired by Shakespeare, as can be seen in his *Lady Macbeth Seizing the Daggers*.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who lived in a medieval dream-world, had a strong Interest in the past. His *Wedding of St George and Princess Sabra* is typical of his desire to recapture the mood of another age. The heraldic equipment is carefully reproduced.

It was Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), absorbed in a composite dream of Dante's Florence and King Arthur's court, who finally implanted in the prosperous setting of Queen Victoria's reign the longing for an earlier time.

A strain of melancholy

The wish to escape from the restrictions of reason into a dreamland of some kind is an important aspect of this period. It evoked dark and supernatural forces, moments of terror and trance, poetic ecstasies, all the heightened sensations of a dream. 'The sleep of reason', said Goya, 'breeds monsters.'

The supernatural assumed such varied forms as the Mephistopheles from Goethe's *Faust* in a picture by Delacroix; and John Martin's (1789–1854) visions of a stupendous Pandemonium. The choking tension

of nightmare is a theme that recurs in Henry Fuseli (1741–1825). The landscapes of the German painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840) suggest a waking trance, with small figures that contemplate the remoteness of the moon, while the German-Swiss Romantic, Arnold Böcklin (1827–1901) imparts a morbid fascination, an eerie silence to his vision of *The Island of the Dead*.

A strain of melancholy was always present in Romanticism. Goethe attributed it to the influence of English poetry, the 'pensive gloom' of such works as Young's *Night Thoughts*. His own novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774),

Field of Corn in the Moonlight, by the English landscape painter Samuel Palmer (1805-81). Charged with a deeply mystical significance, it was painted at a place the artist called 'the valley of visions'.

dealing with frustrated love and suicide, had a prolonged effect, filling impressionable minds throughout Europe with longing for the unattainable culminating in despair. The reaction after the Napoleonic wars, in the 1820s and 1830s turned into pessimism.

Yet Turner's greatest paintings date from 1830 onwards; and even though Delacroix declared that 'only suffering is real', he was nevertheless uplifted and delighted by the exotic experience in 1832 of Algeria and Arab life, which inspired some of his masterpieces and haunted him for the rest of his career as an artist.

Freedom and escapism

The Romantic Movement extended the understanding and emotional capacity of gifted artists, freeing them from the Classical traditions of the immediate past. Interest in the medieval times opened new avenues in the appreciation of art and the romantic landscape added to the feelings of pleasure that nature could give. These are its legacies to the modern world, which are still of importance for art today.

It has already been said that the romantic spirit is not confined to one period, and it follows that evidence of it may be found in the later nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.

In a general sense Romanticism was a starting point, the impetus towards the individuality of expression so characteristic of twentieth-century art – though a different trend subsequently appeared in the greater importance attached to the *style* of painting, rather than the subject.

The young Cézanne (1839–1906) is romantic in the subjects of his paintings, passionate in colour and has the same intensity which he admired in Delacroix, though his later method was the outcome of research pursued with a more scientific deliberation. Gauguin (1848–1903) is romantic in the escapism that sent him in quest of a primitive paradise in the South Seas.

Though it excludes the supernatural, the twentieth-century movement Surrealism may be considered a recurrence of the Romantic attachment to the mysterious and strange. If Classicism is defined as the disciplined ordering of form and content and Romanticism as the liberty of personal expression, both have a present and a continuing significance.

Fantastic and surrealistic painting

Bosch's denizens of Hell, the visions of William Blake, the incongruous imagery of Max Ernst and Salvador Dali — are they chance figments of a dream world or symbols of a super-reality?

AN ELEMENT of the supernatural is found in art from its very beginnings in the cave-paintings of the Palaeolithic period. Certain representations of the human figure, such as the so-called 'sorcerer' of Les Trois Frères (Ariège, France), a man covered with the pelt of a reindeer, are interpreted as evidence of religious or magical practices in these remote ages. Throughout its history art has been associated with the supernatural elements in religion, but this article is concerned rather with the supernatural elements in art itself, those which spring from the artist's own imagination.

Such elements are of two kinds – those which are consciously invented by the artist, and those which, in the manner of dream-images, arise spontaneously from the repressed or unconscious levels of his mind. The Greeks tended to regard the arts of painting and sculpture as conscious crafts – only certain forms of poetry, according to Plato, were 'divine and from the gods'.

Nevertheless, there is in classical art and in the art of the Ancient World in general a symbolic element derived from the supernatural world of the gods, but it is never a personal art, never a representation of the artist's own fantasy. Angels and demons, gods and goddesses, supernatural beings of every kind may be represented, but the manner in which this is done is strictly prescribed.

Dream-images and nightmares

Generally speaking the same is true of early Christian art, which in its beginnings takes over and adapts the conventions of Roman art. New symbolic forms gradually emerge to express a new spiritual belief, but these are 'icons', that is to say, sacred images strictly controlled by the priesthood. Such control extends throughout the Byzantine period, and it is only with Gothic art that an element of the artist's own fantasy begins to intrude.

Already in the Byzantine period, however, the Church became very conscious of this disturbing element, and various efforts were made to control it, beginning with the movement known as Iconoclasm in the eighth and ninth centuries. These

The landscape of a dream, this woodcut, *above,* is a detail of an illustration printed in Venice in 1499. One of a series, it accompanied the romance entitled *The Dream of Poliphilus.* These pictures are among the first examples of the conscious use of dream-imagery in Western art.

persisted throughout the Middle Ages, culminating in the extreme forms of Puritanism in the period of the Reformation.

The release of the artist's private world of fantasy had to wait for the Renaissance, and even then it first took the form of conscious fantasy. We associate the Renaissance with the revival of Classicism, but the greater part of Renaissance art is still devoted to Christian iconography, although admittedly some degree of fantasy could be introduced into the interpretation of the Christian legends.

An element of dream-imagery begins to enter into Italian Renaissance art with such works as *The Dream of Poliphilus*, a series of woodcuts illustrating an allegorical and architectural romance by Fra Francesco Colonna, printed at Venice by Aldus Manutius in 1499. This romance is actually the narration of a dream, and may be considered as a prototype of all subsequent art of the dream world.

Pure fantasy, however, first appears in the work of a contemporary of Francesco Colonna, Hieronymus Bosch, born at 's Hertogenbosch in Holland about 1450.

The first great master of fantasy was the Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch (*c.* 1450–1516). His *Garden of Delights,* of which this is a detail, is rich in weird, irrational images which tease the imagination with their strange beauty. The complex symbolism has so far defied interpretation.

It is important to emphasize the northern origin of this artist, because already in Celtic and Viking art there is an element of the grotesque altogether foreign to the classical (Graeco-Roman) art of the Renaissance, and there is also a rich source of irrational imagery in northern sagas, fairy-tales and folk-lore.

Bosch begins as an allegorical painter, with illustrations of such subjects as the Seven Deadly Sins. Other subjects, such as *The Conjuror, The Cure of Folly* and *The Ship of Fools*, are derived from folk-lore and popular parables. His great masterpieces, however, are of a different order, complex allegories which have some connection with the Christian myth, but which contain a profusion of seemingly irrational images that baffle interpretation.

It has been suggested (by Wilhelm Fraenger) that the key to these mysterious pictures must be sought in the heresies of certain secret cults of which Bosch was an initiate, but though Fraenger's argument is ingenious and so far the only comprehensive key to Bosch's symbolism, there is no firm documentary evidence to support it.

Failing a key to unlock the mystery, one may seek for scattered clues in the traditional iconography of the Christian religion and in the popular legends already mentioned. But these sources are altogether inadequate to explain the complexity and originality of the fantastic images in paintings such as *The Garden of Delights, The Haywain, The Last Judgement* and *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*.

These great works contain a wealth of images that are at once original, irrational and consistent. They constitute a symbolic language whose general intention is clear enough (a condemnation of the folly and absurdity of human life), but for which we still seek a precise meaning.

A psychoanalytical approach has been suggested, but it is significant that neither Freud nor Jung was tempted to this task. Certain images are obvious symbols of life and death, flowers and fruits of evil, sex and lust. It is not, however, the symbols as such that distinguish the paintings of Bosch, but rather the inventiveness of the forms used as symbols, especially the irrational arrangement of images.

These include human bodies with birds' heads, a dog with a withered branch in place of a tail, noses that turn into trumpets, all kinds of fowl and fish such as were never seen on Earth or in the sea, and imps and devils of every conceivable shape.

From Bosch to Blake

Bosch had many imitators in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but none surpassed him in imaginative power. The imaginary landscape flourished in the seventeenth century, for example in the work of Desiderio Monsu, actually two painters from Lorraine working in the

The Simoniac Pope, by William Blake, one of the 102 illustrations to Dante's *Divine Comedy.*

In the eighteenth century, a vogue for horror resulted in many works of a terrifying nature, often inspired by literature. *The Nightmare* by Fuseli explores terror in the romantic, highly emotional, colourful way that preoccupied many poets and artists in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Fuseli taught many British artists, and influenced Blake.

same studio. Alessandro Magnasco prolonged the same style into the eighteenth century, but the general trend of that century was a return to an academic and rational art in keeping with the ideals of the Enlightenment.

Before the end of the century, the movement that was to be known as Romanticism re-interpreted the Platonic philosopher Longinus' ideal of sublimity – 'the expression of a great soul'. Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) introduced an aesthetic of terror, where the sublime includes a state of the soul 'in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror'. Intensity rather than harmony became the highest quality in art.

A 'sublime' version of the Gothic style was revived in architecture, in the building of artificial ruins and grottoes. Many painters had been inspired by the same ideals – in Italy Panini (1692–*c.* 1765) specialized in *capricci* (fantasies) based on Roman ruins, and Piranesi (1720–78) added

the touch of horror by inventing imaginary prisons of terrifying gloom.

In England the sublimity of terror is best represented by a Swiss painter, Henry Fuseli (1741–1825), who settled in London in 1778 and had great fame and influence (his best-known painting is called *The Nightmare*). He had a stylistic influence on William Blake (1757–1827), but in Blake we reach a visionary type of painting for which there are no earlier parallels (though Blake thought of himself as a renovator of the Gothic ideal in art).

The nightmarish fantasies of Fuseli, with which we may compare the gigantic architectural and apocalyptical fantasies of John Martin (1789–1854), do not proceed from the depths of the unconscious; they are often inspired by literature, especially by the Bible and Shakespeare.

Goya satirized the manners of his day in a series of etchings called *Los Caprichos*. The abject, crouching figure is a miser; although over 80, with only a month to live, he is still afraid to spend money.

Far more significant, however, are certain paintings and etchings of Goya (1746–1828), works 'in which fantasy and invention have no limit'. The best known are two series of etchings, *Los Caprichos* (1796–1802) and *The Disasters of War* (1810–13), and some paintings executed late in his life, known as 'the Black Paintings', full of mysterious terror.

Blake and Goya may be regarded as forerunners of the twentieth-century movement known as Surrealism, but it is important to realize that this was also a literary movement, and even its paintings derived much of its inspiration from the literature of the time.

Futurists and Dadaists

Its leading theoretician and animator was the French poet André Breton (1896–1966). Surrealism found its justification in Freud's theory of the unconscious, and is to be understood as an art partly of dream-imagery, partly of hazard or chance (of 'pure automatism', to use Breton's phrase). To explain its origins we must first take note of two earlier movements in the arts: Futurism, which dates from the first manifesto published by the Italian poet Marinetti in 1909, and Dada, founded by a group of writers and artists in Zurich in 1916.

Futurism began as a movement inspired by the machine, and by such abstract concepts as movement, energy and speed; but it rejected all forms of realism or naturalism, and has superficial relations with Cubism, the style evolved by Braque and Picasso in Paris in 1907. From Cubism Picasso developed a new style partly (but decisively) influenced by African tribal art, and gradually irrational images began to dominate his paintings. *The Three*

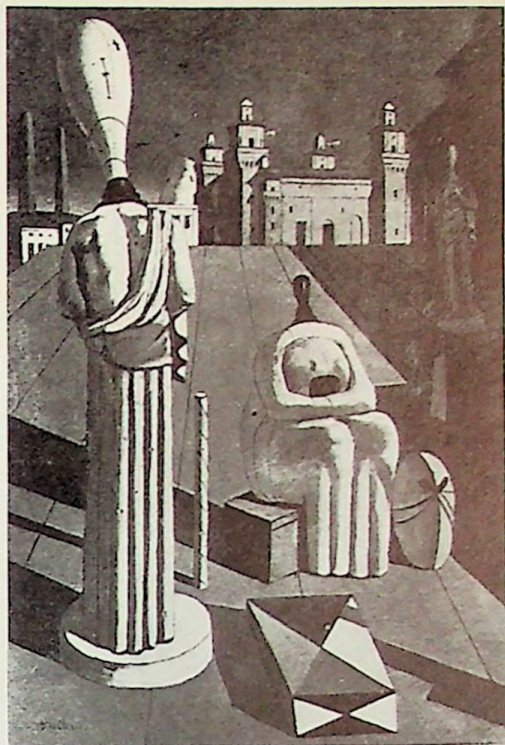
Dancers of 1925 is his first major painting in the surrealist style.

Meanwhile, in Italy another painter had appeared who was to be one of the formative influences on the Surrealist Movement, Giorgio de Chirico (b. 1888). His compositions assembled fantastic architecture of a pseudo-classical kind, monumental sculpture, dummy figures, maps, geometrical designs and occasionally an incongruous railway engine. The general effect is dream-like, but poetic rather than terrifying.

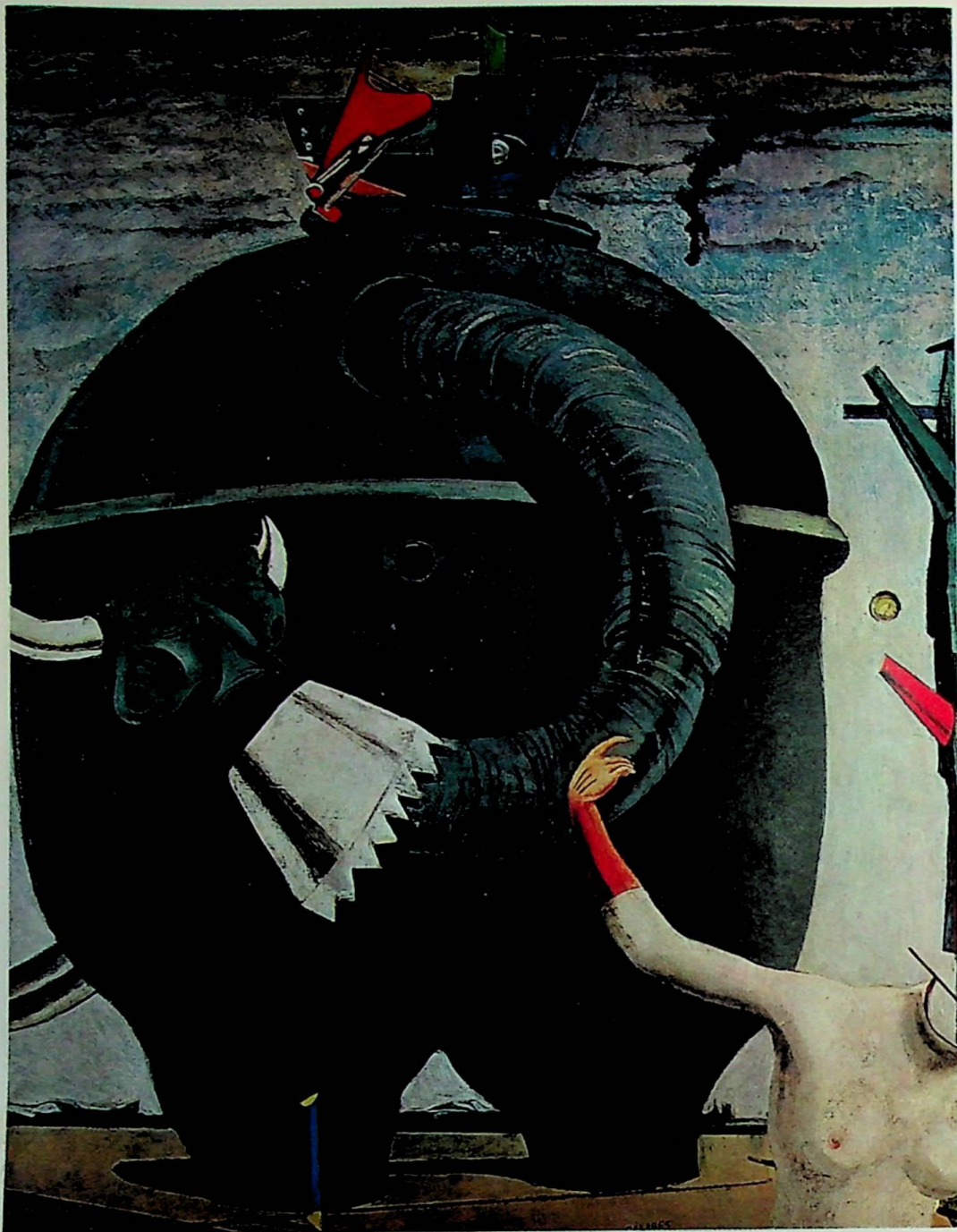
The original element contributed by Dada, for which Hans (Jean) Arp was mainly responsible, was 'the law of chance'. Arp would tear up a piece of paper, let the fragments fall and fix them in the arbitrary pattern they assumed. Many other methods of 'assemblage' were practised by Arp and his fellow Dadaists in Switzerland (Francis Picabia), Germany (Max Ernst, Kurt Schwitters) and the United States (Marcel Duchamp).

Though some of these experiments were not strictly speaking 'surrealistic' in the sense of relying on unconscious imagery, they produced effects which, to the public, were certainly fantastic. When the First World War came to an end, some of the Dadaists, notably Arp and Ernst, were to move to Paris and take part in the Surrealist Movement.

Breton published three manifestos, in 1924, 1930 and 1934. In these he expounded a coherent theory of 'automatism', applicable to all forms of art, including the film, but perhaps especially effective in poetry – it inspired one major French poet, Paul Éluard (1895–1952).

In addition to the painters already mentioned (Arp, Ernst, Duchamp) the group included several painters who were to attain world-wide reputations – Joan Miró, Salvador Dali, André Masson and, though never formally associated with the group, Marc Chagall and Paul Klee (1879–1940). Klee, indeed, has perhaps made the greatest contribution of any artist since Bosch to 'the art of the dream world'. The relation of art to creation is symbolic', he said, and his own work is the best illustration of this truth.

Strange echoes of classical architecture appear in the paintings of Giorgio de Chirico, an Italian painter who helped to create the Surrealist Movement in art. *The Disquieting Muses, above,* with its empty vistas, exaggerated perspective and curiously calm figures has all the elements of de Chirico's early style. Later, the artist turned to visions of interiors peopled by mannequins and mechanical instruments. In the 1930s, he rejected the modern style in painting altogether, returning from dreams to naturalism in his art.

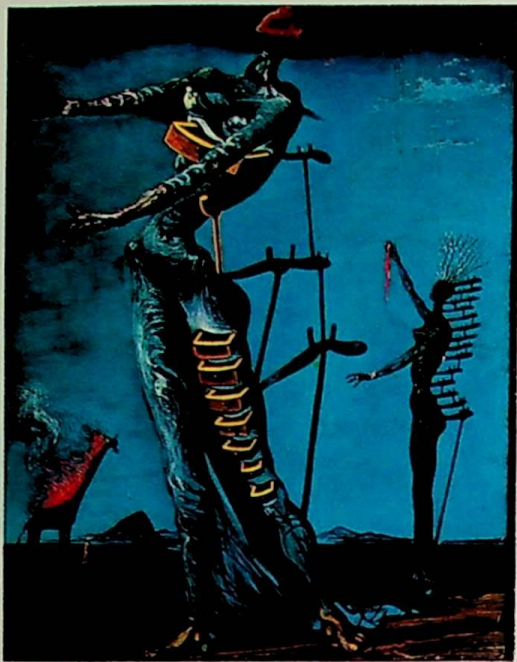
Liberating the unconscious

Breton, who had a medical training and a scientific knowledge of psychiatry, was also deeply influenced by the philosophers

In *The Elephant Celebes, left,* Max Ernst used imagery from the machine world. Paul Klee is an important contemporary figure in the art of the dream world; his *Port Scene* is shown *below.*

Hegel and Marx.

His philosophy was dialectical—its aim was to effect a reconciliation between opposite aspects of human existence—to 'enable the mind to leap the barrier set up for it by the antinomies of reason and dreaming, reason and madness, feeling and representation, etc., which constitute the major obstacle in Western thought'.

He renounced the avowedly destructive or nihilistic aims of Dadaism. He wanted an art 'in the service of the revolution', the social revolution of the Communists. But such an art must come to terms with the unconscious, a region of the mind not recognized by the Communists. The vital forces in human life come from within Man himself, and it is only in so far as we recognize the unconscious source and power of these impulses that we can hope to establish a social reality.

For this reason the Surrealists always show a contempt for the traditional standards of 'quality' in painting; what is important in art is not the painting itself, but the state of mind it reveals, the images that effect a reconciliation between in-

The Burning Giraffe, by Salvador Dali, where the conventional concept of reality is ignored.

stinct and reason, between the unconscious and the conscious.

Surrealism's aim, according to Breton, is not so much to create a dissociation of the artist and reality, but rather 'to unify the personality'. But such unity is only possible if we come to terms with the unconscious, release the mind from its inhibitions and allow the imagination to create a new reality. This, a super-reality, is far superior to the conventional reality which is characterized by hypocrisy, delinquency and tyranny – all proceeding from the non-recognition of the irrational aspects of the human personality.

Surrealism as a coherent movement declined after the Second World War, but it might be said that it has already accomplished its task – not, indeed, the final social revolution to which Breton looked forward, but the admission of an irrational element into the concept of art.

Art can never be the same again: the unconscious has been liberated, and the effects of that release continue to be felt in every sphere of the arts.

Painters of protest

Moved to anger by the wars, poverty and unemployment of the last hundred years, Social Realist painters deliberately aimed at appeal to the masses with their art of 'commitment'.

ART AS the American painter Ben Shahn says, can arise from something stronger than stimulation or even inspiration. It can, he says, take fire from something closer to provocation.

This was particularly true in the nineteenth century, when the stresses and strains of nationalism and industrialization produced one crisis after another, and alienated the more thoughtful and progressive artists from society. Rumbling discontent preceded organized revolt. Sides were taken with varying degrees of personal commitment. Under the militant influence of anarchism and Marxism, this resulted in realistic forms of art being developed as a weapon in what was universally and sincerely felt to be a fight for 'better times' – usually in the shape of some utopian concept of a future society.

This art, which is known as Social Realism, derived from the realistic tradition of the Renaissance. It has at various times moved from one form of art to another, while endeavouring to maintain points of contact with a popular audience. The graphic accusations of Goya were a source of inspiration, as were the paintings of Rembrandt and the moral narratives of William Hogarth. Throughout the nineteenth century their influence was great and had its biggest impact in France and England, where the innovations of lithography and wood-engraving provided artists with new media of pictorial communication, stimulating the development of social comment.

Hard-hitting social satire

Lithography is a cheap process of reproducing an image drawn on limestone by the artist himself. In France, a vigorous radical Press introduced Honoré Daumier (1808–79), who made some 4,000 lithographs. His engaging humanity carried the hard-hitting punch of an inspired partisan of social and political satire. In England, the application of wood-engraving to journalism was a means of reproducing a re-drawn version of an artist's original. Although much less satisfactory artistically than lithography, wood-engraving could be harnessed to steam-power, thus making possible larger editions of the new picture weeklies.

Motivated by the reforming zeal of political and cultural liberalism, these flourished as mass media for a wide range

A Third-class Train Compartment, one of about 4,000 lithographs by Honoré Daumier, a great many of which are concerned with social and political satire.

of social comment. The London weekly *Graphic* (founded in 1869), for example, introduced the work of a school of young crusading painter-illustrators. In spite of their sometimes sentimental preoccupation with the misery and humiliation of Victorian England, Luke Fildes, Frank Holl, Hubert Herkomer, George Pinwell and Arthur Boyd Houghton can still give us a strong taste of the human dramas enacted daily in railway stations, workhouses, cottages and garish gin-palaces.

These scenes of nineteenth-century low life were surveyed at a much greater depth, and at much closer quarters, by Gustave Doré (1832–83), Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen (1859–1923) and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901). Doré's great album, *London,* published in 1872, is a terrifying social chronicle which inspired Van Gogh's well-known painting *Prison Yard.* Steinlen, who resembled Daumier in so many ways, was a friend of every outcast of society. Staunchly Socialist, his was a wistful, occasionally powerful art of the poor which reached a wide audience in the pages of weekend supplements of Socialist dailies. The aristocratic Toulouse-Lautrec turned a less genial but no less tolerant eye on much the same world. He contributed bitingly observed scenes of human frailty to the *avant-garde L'Escarmouche,* edited by his anarchist friends Georges Darien and H. G. Ibels.

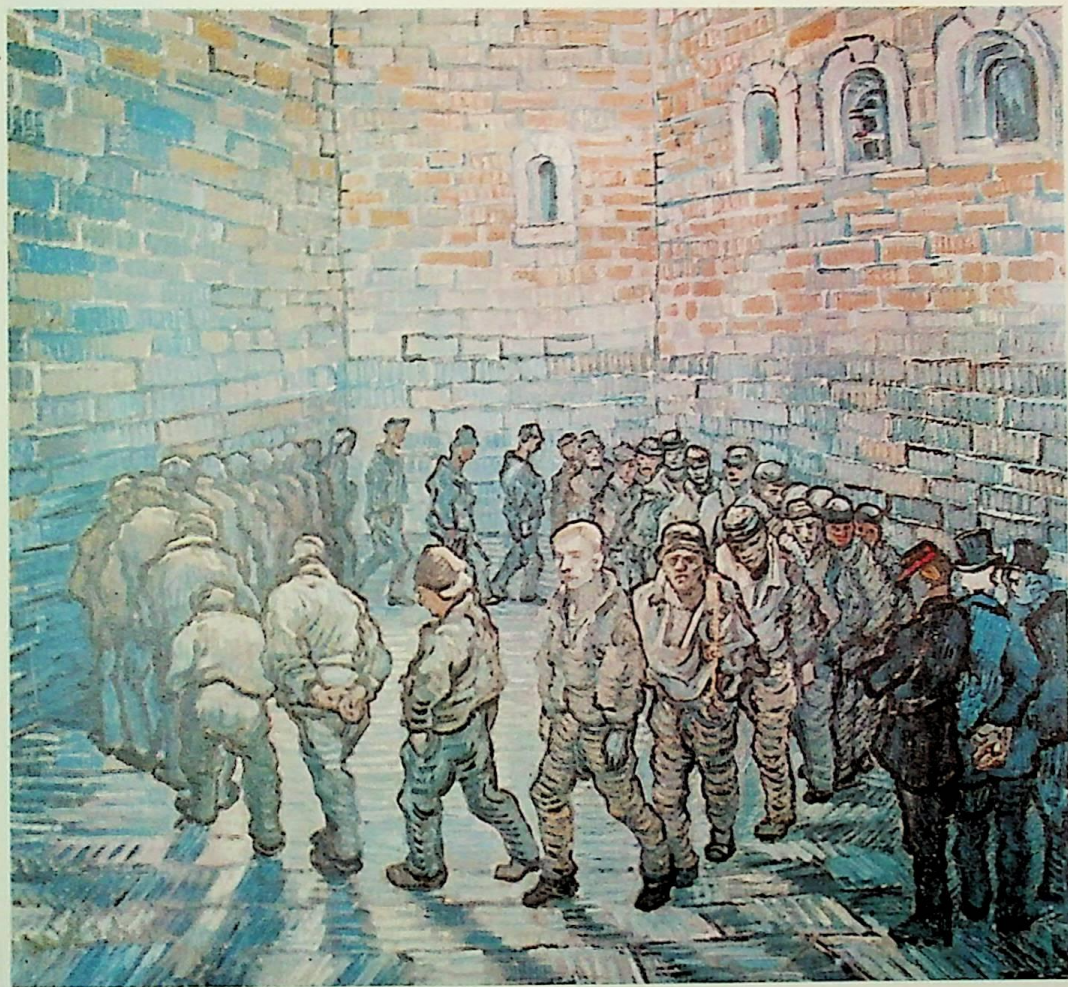
Steinlen and Toulouse-Lautrec created a current strong enough to form the ideas of a whole army of young painters anxious to protest against the mounting violence of life between 1900 and 1914. This was one of the great periods of social art, in which artists contributed damning chronicles

of vice and virtue to a vast number of ephemeral *avant-garde* periodicals published in France, Germany, the United States and Russia.

Chronicles of war

In painting and sculpture, the current was no less strong. The 'Blue Period' of Pablo Picasso; the *Weaver's Revolt* of Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945); the Barcelona paintings of Isidro Nonell (1873–1911); the New York scenes of John Sloan (1871–1951), and the sculpture of Constantin Meunier (1831–1905) established Social Realism as an important and developing movement, closely related to the writings of Ibsen and Gorki.

This, however, was only a prelude, for

Prison Yard by Van Gogh was inspired by Gustave Doré's terrifying scenes of 'low life'. The high walls rise in a menacing fashion, dwarfing the ring of prisoners tramping mechanically in a circle, while the bluish-brown colour accentuates the sombre nature of the scene.

the First World War introduced an area of experience undreamt of until then. Modern warfare could only be interpreted by those who possessed a visual language flexible enough to convey its apocalyptic nature. Such a language, Expressionism, had been perfected in Germany throughout the 1900s after the example of Van Gogh and Edvard Munch. Three important artists – Otto Dix (b. 1891), Max Beckmann (1884–1950) and George Grosz (1893–1959) – were seldom able to forget their years as combatants, and their chronicles of the war and its equally terrible aftermath possess a strange and searching power that makes one shudder, as though one were standing at the edge of an abyss.

Social Realism is sometimes confused with Socialist Realism, a term used to describe official Soviet art. The Soviet brand, however, differs a great deal from that of Western Europe and the United States. Social Realism thrives on changing techniques of expression, because successive generations trained in different ways make social statements in their own personal style. After the October Revolution of 1917, this was done in Russia by such Communist artists as the young Alexander Deineka, Yuri Pimenov and Andrei Goncharov (The Group of Three), all of whom portrayed the changing character of Russian life in the sophisticated graphic idiom of the 1920s. But then a shift of policy suddenly cut the lifelines of contemporary Russia art. Since the early 1930s, what passes for Social Realism, or Socialist Realism, in the USSR, is nothing more than the rehabilitated tradition of nineteenth-century Russian realism.

This rehabilitation of an outmoded tradition was achieved with marked success in Mexico, when a period of national reawakening after the revolution of 1910 revived every sphere of cultural activity. New assessments of Mexico's ancient Indian art were officially recognized, as well as the contribution that contemporary European art could make to evolving a modern social idiom. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, this was seen in the tragic Expressionism of José Clemente Orozco, an artist profoundly aware of his time. It can also be seen in the monumental humanism of Diego Rivera, probably the last great fresco painter. The passionate vitality of a third giant, David Alfaro Siqueros, reveals a talent which sought to express itself in tempestuous, heroic shapes conveying the solemn power of Man's struggle for self-determination, which grew in violence as the century entered its third decade.

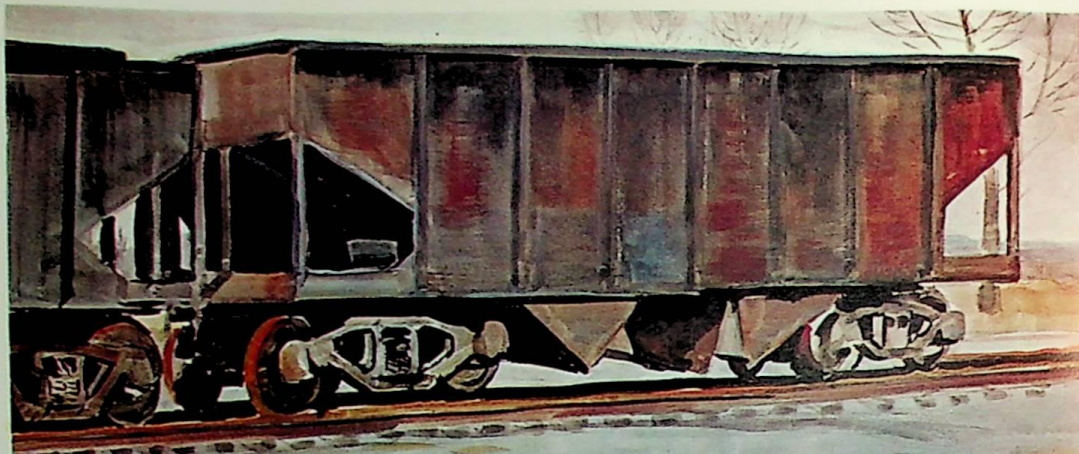
The 1930s began with catastrophe. Stock markets slumped; banks failed; crops were destroyed while people starved; factories closed and armies of desperate men marched on the capital cities of the world. Growing up in this uncertain world was no joke, and once again a revival of social consciousness took place which still has its after-effects. Painters throughout Europe, Asia and the Americas created a militant art of protest against unemployment, hunger and war.

Although the political Left stimulated the development of an avowedly propagandist social art, it was not responsible for a Social Realism broader and more national in scope. American art, for example, came of age with the impressive amount of enlightened government patronage in the thirties, which broadened the horizons of thousands of artists. In one year alone, 3,000 artists were commissioned to paint murals in government buildings for the Public Works of Art project.

Fires of commitment

The even more ambitious Federal Art Project commissioned paintings of the great work projects of the New Deal. An art of the American scene emerged,

Rear Guard, by Orozco, a Mexican artist inspired by the suffering of his country impoverished and torn by civil war. His tragic, elongated figures march with bent heads towards an uncertain destiny, women and children following behind.

strongly social in character, from such artists as Charles Burchfield, Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry, Aaron Bohrod, Paul Sample, Edward Hopper, Reginald Marsh, Walter Dehn, Allen

1 *Freight Trucks in March,* painted in 1933 by the American artist Charles Burchfield. The Works Progress Administration Project in America, formed during the Depression years, commissioned large numbers of works from artists like Burchfield and stimulated the development of American social art. Ben Shahn painted many public murals under this scheme; *Welders* (detail) **2** was painted later, in 1943, and shows his continuing preoccupation with the world of work.

2

The Mechanic, by Fernand Léger. The artist makes use of the geometric shapes and the clear, grey metallic surfaces of machines to build up his robot-like forms. He met Braque and Picasso in 1910 and his work shows the influence of Cubism.

Saalburg and Ben Shahn.

Social Realism in the United States enabled a wide public to lose some of its ignorance of the modern art of its time. It also did so in Europe, when a fiercely humanitarian Picasso was roused by the destruction of a Spanish town called Guernica during the Spanish Civil War, to paint *Guernica* (1937), perhaps the most widely-known historical painting of the century. Picasso's belligerent bohemianism, dormant since his 'Blue Period', broke out again in the 1950s when he painted *War and Peace*, a condemnation of the Korean War raging at the time.

He was not alone; the Left had emerged from the Second World War with great prestige as the chief leaders of the resistance against the Nazi occupation of Europe. In doing so, they revived the fires of commitment among many famous figures of the modern movement, notably Léger, Matisse and Braque, as well as Picasso. All announced their membership of the Communist Party of France. Thus began another phase which added their influence, particularly Picasso's, to that of the Mexicans and the German Expressionists, resulting in new movements of Social Realism in Italy, France and England.

Typical of much Communist art this drawing, *The Peasant*, by the Italian painter Renato Guttuso, was done in 1948.

From the turbulence of post-war Italy, talented groups of painters, led by Gabriele Mucchi in Milan and Renato Guttuso in Rome, created a popular art of great interest. In France, Mireille Mialle, Boris Tazlitsky and André Fougeron attempted to do likewise. In Italy and France, a new factor is the extent of the patronage extended to these artists by trade-union and political organizations of the Left. In England also, continental Social Realism influenced the early work of Edward Middleditch, Derrick Greaves, Jack Smith and John Bratby, the 'Kitchen Sink school' of the 1950s.

Social Realism in these more affluent times would appear to be largely ineffective as a means of communication with almost any kind of audience. Disillusionment with social or political forms of protest contributes to the decline of Social Realism at any given time. This was so in the late 1950s. Protest and dissent is just as strong among young artists, but this is made more effectively in such media as magazine illustration and caricature.

In painting, however, it may be said to survive in much of the figurative art of the 1960s, particularly in the scenes of modern life painted by artists of the 'Pop school', and in the deeply personal, but nevertheless deeply concerned, imagery of Francis Bacon.

Art goes Pop

Embracing material hitherto despised – science fiction, comic strips, pin-ups – Pop has created a revolution in the art world by questioning the very notion of what art should be.

IN 1957, Richard Hamilton, one of the first Pop artists, put on paper a rough working definition of what Pop is. It is: intended for a mass audience, transient, expendable, mass-produced and cheap, young, witty, sexy, gimmicky, glamorous and deeply involved in Big Business.

This definition radically opposes all the traditional ideas of what 'Art' should be like. According to the majority of writers and artists ever to have attempted the difficult task of defining the nature and purpose of art, it is: intended for a select few, enduring, precious, unique and costly.

Such a radical reappraisal of 'Art' and 'culture' is the most important aspect of Pop. Pop artists force us to ask questions about the nature of 'culture' itself. What exactly *is* art? What can 'cultured' people permit themselves to enjoy, and what must they recognize as beneath them? Is not our notion of 'fine art' and 'culture' snobbish, narrow-minded and out of date? In terms of such a wide reassessment of basic concepts Pop Art came into being.

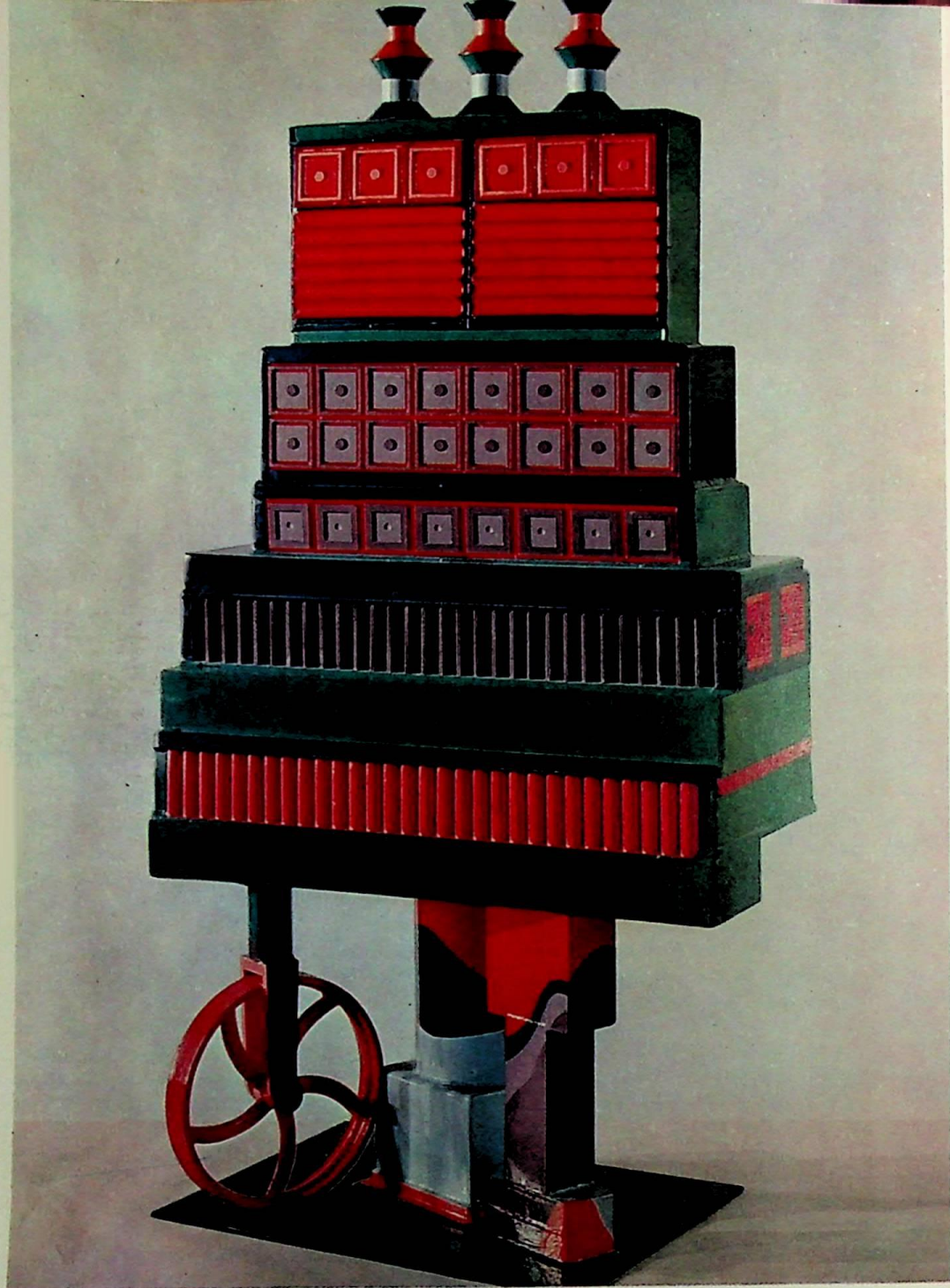
No style ever came to fame – or notoriety – as rapidly as Pop did. It appeared, was given the solid critical seal of approval by the writers and museums, and was taken up by the public at large within the space of something like ten years.

Pop is both English and American. More precisely, it is London and New York, and was born first in London. Its artists are rooted in the city, but their view of the city is not a deeply philosophical one, as Mondrian's was. They see it rather as a scene thick with symbols, criss-crossed with the tracks of human activity.

The Institute of Contemporary Arts in London (the ICA) is a club for artists, musicians and writers. Beginning in 1952, discussions of an unusual kind took place there and were held for several years. They were organized by a group who called themselves the Independent Group (IG).

Fit for undeveloped minds

The IG did not talk about the Idea of Perspective in the Renaissance, or the Post-Impressionist Revolution, but about Science Fiction, automobile styling, popular music, gangster films. Interest in this sort of thing was regarded as a mark of semi-literacy, fit only for the under-developed minds of those unfortunately unable to appreciate anything better.

The first IG discussion directly related

In London, the sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi led artists to look at images from every day. *Left, The City of the Circle and the Square.*

to what we now understand as 'Pop' was in 1952 when the sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi showed slides of images culled from magazines, comic books, billboards and films. With that, as one of those present later wrote: 'the very notion of culture changed before one's eyes'. It was of course the very notion of culture that the IG was trying to change. They had the nerve to suggest that comics and all the good things forbidden them as children by anxious parents were there to be enjoyed, and were in fact enjoyable. In them, the IG recognized a more complete expression of the times than in the art, literature and music self-consciously produced as 'culture'.

In 1954 Lawrence Alloway, the critic and one of the IG's guiding lights, lumped all these good things together under the term 'Pop Art'. To begin with the term was therefore not applied to 'art' at all, but to the products of the modern urban Admass society: the ads, comics, movies and so on. In other words Alloway meant something like 'Contemporary Folk Art'. Much later the word came to be applied, in Britain and America, to the work of artists adapting, in one way or another, the imagery of commercialism to their work.

Most of the IG's members admired, almost revered, America. The magazines, films, writing and ads which the IG members preferred were American. One of them returned from a trip with a trunkload of *Playboys, Mads, Esquires* and so on which were something of a revelation.

America had been traditionally regarded as a pale imitation of Europe as far as culture was concerned. Now its real culture the 'art' which most completely expresses everything American, was discovered by the Old World, as it had once discovered the continent itself. This discovery led to America being regarded as the fountainhead of everything modern. Whereas in the eighteenth century the cultured gentleman had made his Grand Tour to Italy, younger artists now began to go to America for their general education.

The IG organized exhibitions related to its discussion programme, and the first phase of the IG, and of English Pop (1953–8), reveals a predominant interest in technology. In 1955 Richard Hamilton, a painter, teacher, and beside Alloway the IG's strongest intellectual force, organized an exhibition at the ICA called 'Man Machine Motion' in which he explored the visual explosion of the twentieth century as a source of imagery.

A cheesecake nude

More important was the 'This is Tomorrow' exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery a year later. It explored the possibilities of collaboration between architects, painters and sculptors. It was not an 'art exhibition' in any conventional sense; there were no 'pictures' as such.

Hamilton himself, for example, worked on an environment which was similar to something from a fun-fair, with a false perspective and soft floors. The exhibition also included what is now taken to be the first definite piece of Pop Art: a photographic collage by Hamilton entitled *'Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?'* This shows an interior with a cheesecake nude, a bodybuilder, a framed cover of an American film magazine on the wall, a lolly on which the word 'pop' appears, and a view of a cinema through a window. Transient, expendable, cheap, young, witty, sexy and gimmicky. In 1957 Hamilton, using Pop imagery, executed *Homage à Chrysler Corp* in which the shapes derived from automobile design are combined to create a paradoxically sensual effect.

Paolozzi and Hamilton had part-time jobs at the Royal College of Art (the RCA)

Towards a Definite Statement of the Coming Trends in Men's Wear by Richard Hamilton.

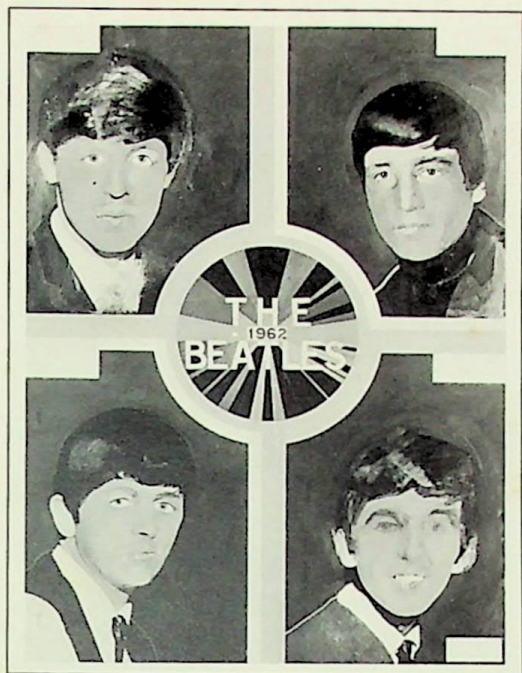
and the College soon became the centre of the second phase of Pop. Their influence was enormous, but so too was that of R. Kitaj, an American at the College under the G.I. Bill, and Peter Blake, who graduated from the RCA in 1956.

Kitaj's work is mainly based on collage techniques. He combines hand-drawn, hand-painted passages with photographically reproduced images and reproductions of real material in compositions which cannot be understood without following up the references Kitaj actually gives in the paintings and prints themselves: famous murder trials, works of philosophy and literary criticism.

Blake's work is much more accessible. Although he uses American-derived imagery in some of his work (Bo Diddley, Elvis, Marilyn Monroe), he cultivates a feeling for paint which is thoroughly English. Most Pop Art uses imagery which expresses nostalgia for the more or less immediate past. The great number of pictures in homage to Marilyn Monroe, for example, were done after her death. Blake's roots lie further back, in Victoriana. He paints things like Victorian postcards and music-hall stars. One of his most obvious Pop gestures was to design, with his wife, the cover of the Beatles' 'Sergeant Pepper' LP, which itself includes parodies of old-time music hall.

The students stimulated and influenced at the RCA by Paolozzi, Hamilton, Kataj and Blake, emerged on the scene at the Young Contemporaries exhibition of 1961. Richard Smith, Derek Boshier, Patrick Caulfield and David Hockney exhibited together with Alan Jones, Peter Phillips and Anthony Donaldson.

The essential spirit of Pop

Hockney transforms Pop imagery (Typhoo Tea Packets, badly designed 'modern' furniture) with an apparently graphic style, often reminiscent of scurrilous graf-

The Beatles, was painted in oil on canvas by Peter Blake, one of Britain's foremost Pop artists who studied at the Royal College of Art.

fiti. He gives the spectator a wry dig in the ribs accompanied by a knowing wink. Caulfield takes traditionally 'artistic' motifs – landscapes, still-lifes, often even the work of other painters (Delacroix for example) – and renders them in a colourful but brutally simplified and anonymous way. The result may seem tasteless, even sacrilegious, but never ugly. Alan Jones's most persistent characteristic is a kinky eroticism, a preoccupation with stockings, high-heeled shoes, panties and suspender-belts, which he transforms into colourful, mixed images. Lately a self-conscious seriousness seems to have crept into his work, at variance with the spirit of Pop Art: without wit and a certain throw-away quality it begins to lose its point.

Perhaps the most interesting and original of these artists is Richard Smith. His sources are commercial, but he uses them in far less direct way than most of his contemporaries. To begin with he took the look, the three-dimensional quality of packaging – cigarette packets, detergent packets – and transformed them into more purely 'artistic' images, made the raw material 'art' by transforming it to that point where its source was almost but not quite, unrecognizable. It led him to use shaped canvases, and it is his work in this direction which seems most capable of further development.

In the 1950s the great figures of English

Using a 1930s' style, the young English artist. Patrick Caulfield transformed *Greece Expiring on the Ruins of Missolonghi* by Delacroix and rendered it in a simplified, anonymous fashion.

art, Moore, Nicolson, Pasmore and Sutherland, were considered to be old-fashioned, irrelevant to any new art. Pop is as unlike anything proposed by these artists as it possibly could be. Pop artists asked questions like 'How close to its source can a work of art be and preserve its identity?' and 'How can you paint a picture so that it is as vulgar as possible, as far removed from ideas of conventional taste and beauty as possible?' This is a measure of how radically British Pop artists questioned traditional notions of 'art'.

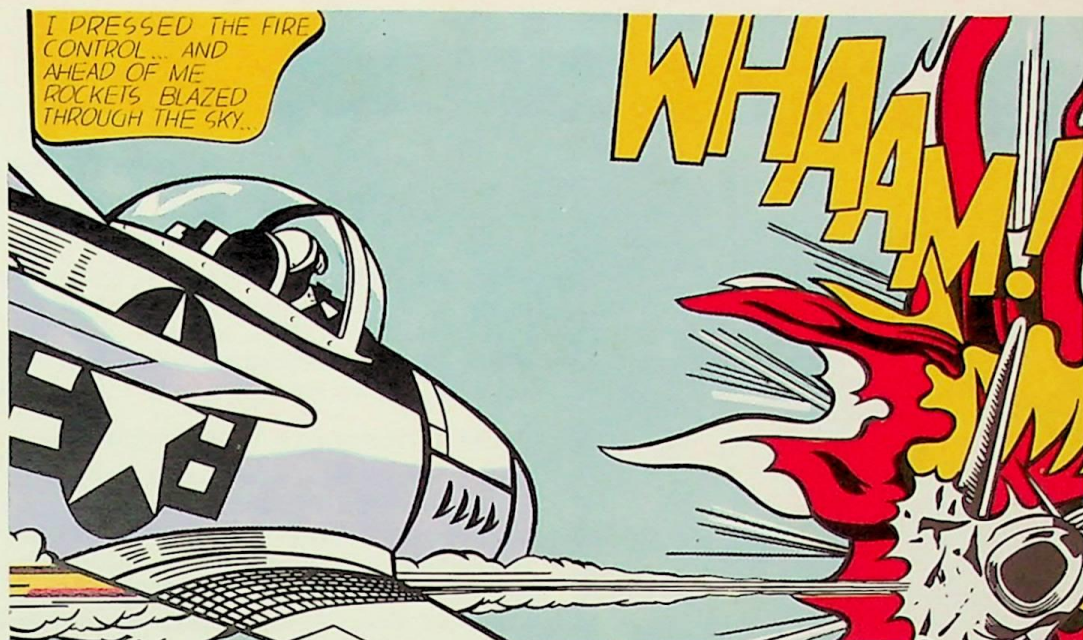
Although similar to British Pop, American Pop is by no means identical. Its parents were quite different. Unlike Britain, it was drawing on its own culture. The British Pop artists looked across the Atlantic with a kind of awe, honouring in a romantic way a country most of them knew only second-hand from movies and magazines. American Pop artists recognized that their country's true culture was not European but the modern folk art of hoardings, movies and the whole spectrum of technological progress.

Pop is characterized by a predilection for mass media. An important innovator in America is Robert Rauschenberg, who accepts the society in which he lives, and incorporates its images in his work. His *Short Stop* is shown, *below*.

The roots of American Pop are not theoretical. Its immediate forebears are two painters, Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, who forged a link between Abstract Expressionism – 'action painting' – and the return to figuration which was Pop's final destination.

Patina of paint

Johns, in 1955, set himself the problem of painting an abstract work which had at the same time a recognizable image. Paradoxical though it may sound, Johns in fact succeeded. He took as geometrical an image as he could – a target, then the American flag – and then painted it in such a way that the beauty of the paint itself, its texture, inherent qualities, emerged strongly. So attractive is the patina of paint, the surface quality of Johns's pictures, that the motif, the image, becomes less and less important. He therefore hinted at the same sort of problem the British painters had posed: What is the relationship between the source of the picture and what is made out of it?

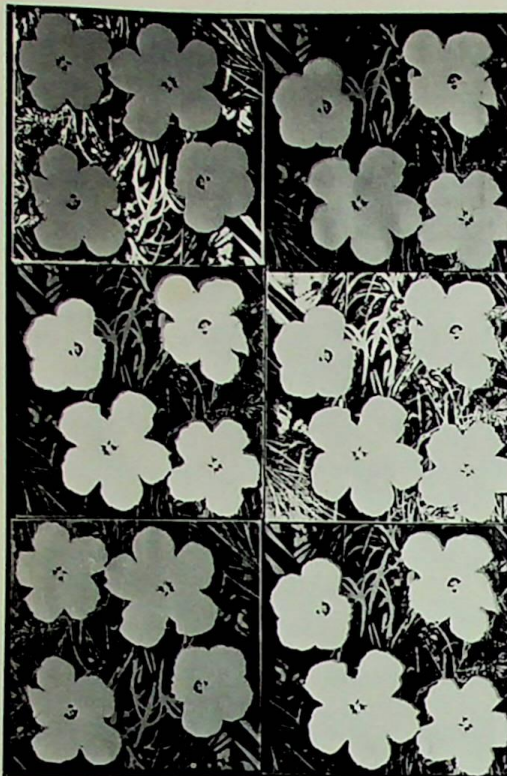
The artists of the Dada movement, and most notably Marcel Duchamp, had been concerned with similar ideas. Duchamp had at one time exhibited what he called 'ready-mades': a shovel, a urinal, a bottle-rack. Johns and Rauschenberg (who also included real objects – rubber tyres, Coca Cola bottles – in his work) thus forged the link between the Dada artists, the Abstract Expressionists and a younger

American artist Roy Lichtenstein shattered notions that art should be artistic by his re-creations of comic-strip scenes.

group of artists concerned with bringing back figurative imagery into their work.

Duchamp was not the only influence from the past. Stuart Davis, a pre-war American painter, had, partly influenced by Cubist collage, done paintings of Lucky Strike cigarette packets. Moreover Léger, the French painter who humanized mechanical forms, was in America for a time and claimed that without the 'bad taste' of New York he would have been unable to produce what he did.

It was not until the spring of 1961 that the first pure American Pop artists emerged. Rosenquist, Lichtenstein, Oldenburg, Warhol and Wesselman, however, although influenced to a greater or lesser degree by Johns, Rauschenberg or the Dadaists, do count as Pop artists, and by 1962 they were so in evidence in the New York galleries that critics began to coin phrases to describe the new art. 'Neo-Dada' was proposed, as was 'OK-Art'. One critic even christened them 'new vulgarians'. Finally the British term triumphed.

Roy Lichtenstein was responsible for very large canvases, on which he reproduced single frames of coloured comic strips. At first sight they appear to be large-size replicas, but compared with the original frames he copied, the finished Lichtensteins are models of simplification and 'improvement'. He clarifies compositional crudities, simplifies the forms and makes something tight, complete and arresting out of his source. Taken out of their context, the situations presented in the single frames have a sort of Surrealist detachment. A girl weeps and says something urgent to her boy-friend. What went before and comes after is denied us.

The problem for British and American Pop artists is very similar. They have to avoid everything that can be seen to be art by people who hold traditional views about what 'art' is. That is why not all

The American Andy Warhol has used silk screening to reproduce his images. He printed them on white or monochrome canvas, sometimes in different shades of intensity. *Flowers* is shown *above*.

commercial subject-matter will do as source material for a Pop painter. Some ads are so good, so subtle, that they themselves become art. The Pop artist must choose bad commercial art which is tasteless or clichéd or both. In this way he can pose the problems he wishes to pose in more urgent a fashion.

Warhol, a young painter, who also makes films, plays a similar game to Lichtenstein's. He reached notoriety with his reproductions of Campbell's soup cans and Brillo boxes, true to the originals in every detail, except that now and again they are painted in various colours. Often Warhol has nothing to do with the execution of his work at all, simply getting others to photograph the originals, make stencils or negatives and then print them on canvas or paper. Need an artist be personally involved with the execution of a picture, or is the idea behind it enough to make it 'art' and his own work? Warhol makes this always intensely difficult problem even harder to answer by sticking so close to his originals that New York housewives have taken to exhibiting real soup cans and real Brillo boxes as works of art in their own right.

From trousers to hamburgers

Tom Wesselman is much more obviously concerned with cliché than either Lichtenstein or Warhol. His *Great American Nudes* are most often compositions consisting of pink forms on which closely observed details, like pubic hair, lips and teeth in conventional 'cheesecake' grimace, appear. The completed pictures are a mixture of cliché and sensuality.

Claes Oldenburg specializes in reproducing in enlarged size any number of objects – from trousers to hamburgers – in substances as far removed from the originals as possible. He makes ice-lollies from plastic stuffed with kapok, pairs of trousers five times their original size, hamburgers from plaster. Again the character of the original object and its relationship to the finished 'art' product is put in question.

American Pop brought about as much of a revolution as British Pop did. It brought recognizable subject-matter back into art without making art 'literary' again, without making it tell stories. As Roy Lichtenstein said: 'Art since Cézanne has become extremely romantic and unrealistic, feeding on art . . . it has had less and less to do with the world. Pop Art looks out into the world; it appears to accept its environment, not good or bad, but different, another state of mind.'

Op's eye-bending world

Flickering, vibrating, in a perpetual dazzle of real or illusory motion, 'Op' and Kinetic Art have in this century opened up for artists an entirely new and exciting dimension of movement.

'OP' IS SHORT FOR 'OPTICAL', and 'kinetic' comes from the Greek word for movement. Op Art and Kinetic Art have one important factor in common: *movement*. But whereas a Kinetic artist uses *actual* movement in his work, an Op artist is interested in creating the *illusion* of movement – what apparently moves in fact remains static.

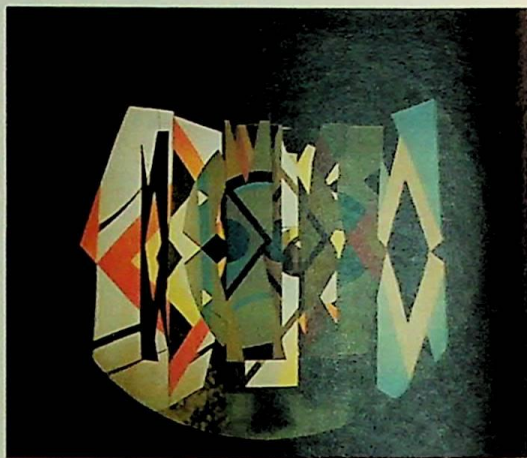
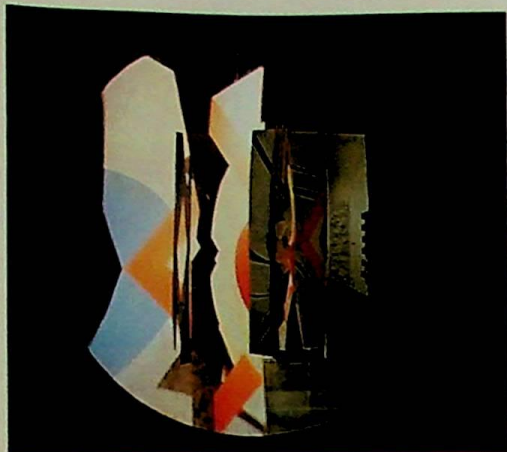
Shortly after it first appeared on the scene, Op Art was taken up lock, stock and barrel by the popular press. Journalists, not always careful about the way they use their terms, applied the word Op to a bewildering number of things – to anything vaguely modern, or vaguely abstract. Fashion and furniture designers and everyone in the communications business began to produce posters, shoes, clothes and interior designs which were largely based on the work of Op artists. 'Be an Op-Art Optimist' was a headline in one women's magazine. Even though the publicity people dropped Op as quickly as they had taken it up and went over to something else, the result has been to blur the intentions of Op Art and to detract from its real meaning and significance.

All art relies on optical tricks and all art is a form of illusion. Whether Leonardo paints the Virgin, Chardin a still-life or Monet a landscape, the game is still the same: they are trying to make us see something that is not really there. A painting is the illusion of a window out on to the world or inward into the artist's mind.

The creation of illusion is a very complex business. It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century, when scientists began to investigate the ways in which the perceptive faculties work, that the extent of its complexity was first realized.

Tricked by illusion

Op Art uses to artistic ends what science knows of optical effects and illusionism. Op paintings tend to be composed of shapes arranged and articulated to have an immediate, powerful and disturbing effect on the eye. They create illusions of movement, colour and volume, and play with the eyes as capriciously as a cat plays with a mouse. They dazzle, flicker and vibrate in a state of permanent unrest. They *act* on the spectator sometimes so aggressively that they are almost impossible to look at for any length of time.

If you look at a white square on a black background for long enough, and then look

Four moments in the metamorphosis of *Imoos VI* by Bryan Wynter. Strange, lyrical effects are achieved by coloured cards rotating before a concave mirror in a box. Because the reverse sides of the planes are more brilliant, their images appear more real than the actuality. The planes are, furthermore, so placed that the images constantly surge forward into the world of the viewer.

suddenly at the ceiling, you will see a black square on white there. It will also jump and vibrate before it gradually fades away completely. If you draw two parallel lines and then cross them diagonally with lines of unequal length, the two original lines will look anything but parallel. Such classic demonstrations of the eccentricities of the eye recur in a sophisticated form in Op Art. The eye is fallible, it can be tricked and misled. But it can be tricked in prearranged ways. This, briefly, is the theory behind Op.

The Primary function of Op, however, is not to aggravate the eye. Michael Kidner, for example, a British painter who learned from Op without becoming an Op artist, says that he uses optics as a means to a much bigger end: 'a good painting'. 'Optics is a tool, as perspective once was.' Op, like

every other serious art form, did not suddenly happen. It has a past. This past needs to be briefly considered if we are to know anything about Op.

Op Art's Impressionist past

As we know, scientists began investigating the problem of optics and perception around the middle of the nineteenth century. Gradually their findings began to filter through to artists. The Impressionists welcomed scientific experiments with open arms, for they were above all intent on reproducing nature more truthfully than it had been done before, and they could only do this if they knew how we see and perceive. They based some of their paintings on what science told them about the nature of colour and form.

Seurat and his fellow Neo-Impressionists took Impressionism one stage further and proceeded in an expressly scientific fashion, surrounding themselves with pots of paint in the colours of the spectrum, from red to violet, to build up their pictures with tiny spots of pure, unmixed colour. Their studios were like laboratories. In working along these lines, they believed that they were painting reality even more faithfully than their friends the Impressionists had done. The results are, ironically, less realistic than Impressionist work, but they have an undeniable beauty, shimmering with brightness as though they conceal within them their own personal light source.

No one would call the Neo-Impressionists 'Op artists' – the term is in any case exclusively applied to work produced in the last ten years or so – but Seurat and his colleagues were the first to be consciously interested in the way the eye works, and rigorously to apply scientific findings to art. We have to wait some time before we again find the science of optics being used in art in such a thorough-going way.

The biggest problem faced by all abstract artists is that of subject, of 'content'. If all reference to the real world is cut out, what saves the painting from being decoration and nothing more? (Decoration may be

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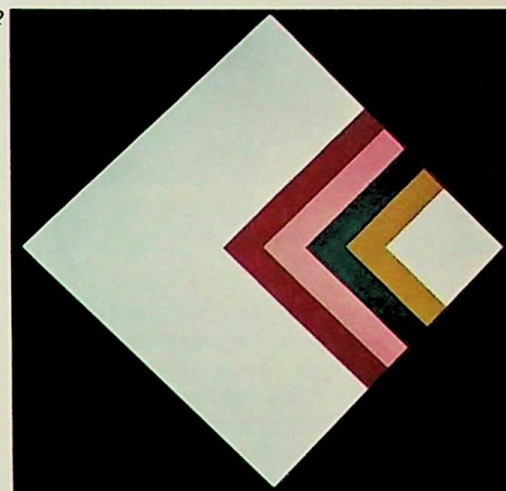
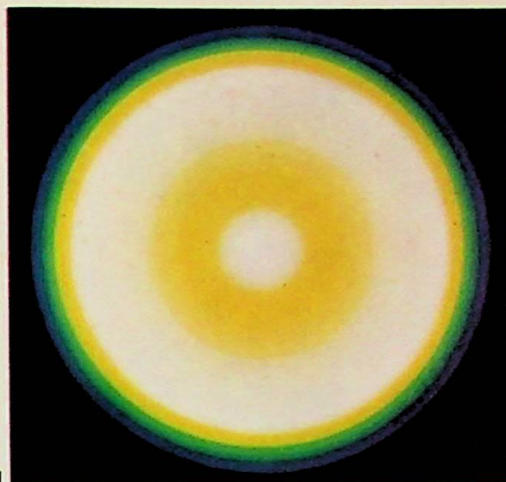
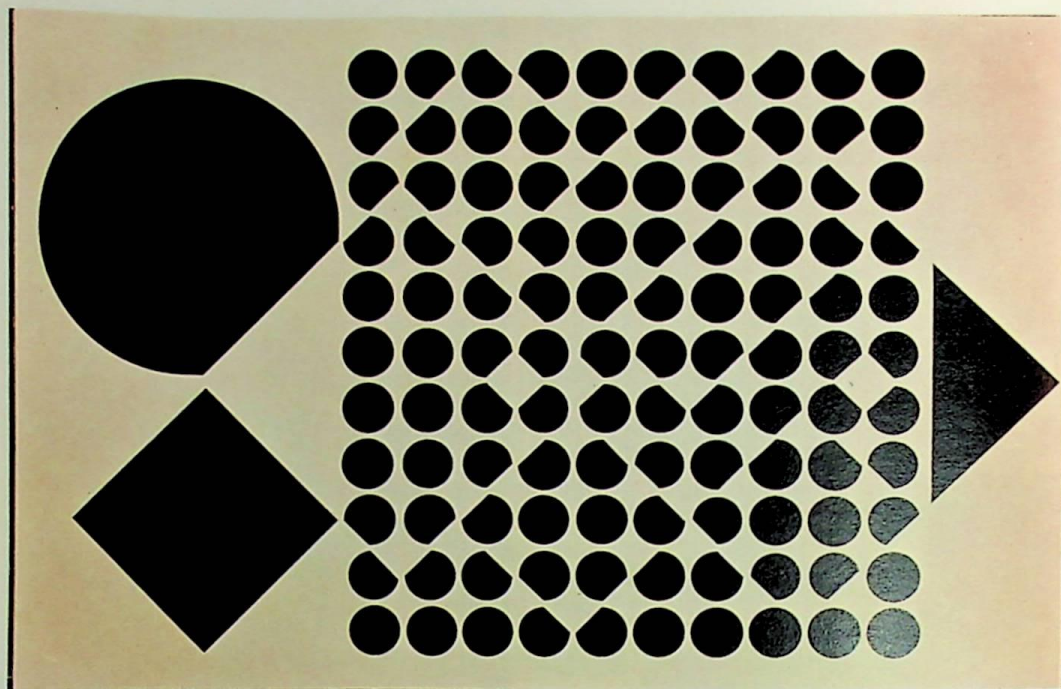

1 *Quantum 3* by Peter Sedgely combines the optical illusions of space and receding distance with rich, decisive colour. 2 One of the most forward-looking of the Abstractionists, Kenneth Noland's works are proof that even without actual composition, a picture may still be coherent. Primacy given to colour effectively lightens rigid geometric form of his *Apart*.

Sometimes termed the 'Father of Op', Victor Vasarely created the illusion of movement by skilful juxtaposition of contrasting shapes and colours, as in his *Cassiopée*.

beautiful, but it is not thought to be as worthy as 'real' art.) Abstract artists have traditionally tried to solve this problem by recourse to the 'spiritual'. In other words, they claim that their abstract configurations either speak directly to the spectator's soul (and much more clearly than realistic works can) or else reveal something of the universal laws which control the Universe. Op artists solve the problem by appealing to science, by controlling the spectator's eye completely, by stimulating definite responses according to the rules discovered by scientists and perceptual psychologists.

In the work of some Geometric Abstractionists – Mondrian and Albers for example – optical effects are used with consequence but never exclusively. The first artist, influenced by Mondrian and Albers, to rely exclusively on optical effects is Victor Vasarely. A Hungarian aristocrat turned Frenchman, Vasarely denies that he is the 'Father of Op', but admits that he was among the first to isolate qualities like ambiguity and the juxtaposition of colour and shape to give the illusion of movement or vibration, and he began to do this as early as 1935.

Vasarely, for a time alone in his experiments, has had an enormous influence. In England the leading Op artist is a woman, Bridget Riley, whose work, although it can be analysed scientifically, does not directly stem from a knowledge of science – of optics or mathematics. Her work first came to the notice of the public about ten years ago and she says that she is above all interested in the way patterns affect the emotions. Riley thus

Bridget Riley's use of parallel lines — their changing curvature and thickness create an intensely provoking optical effect, which the spectator may well consider disturbing.

stands somewhat apart from Vasarely, whose work has a much more technical slant, and who describes his studio as 'a laboratory of visual sensations'.

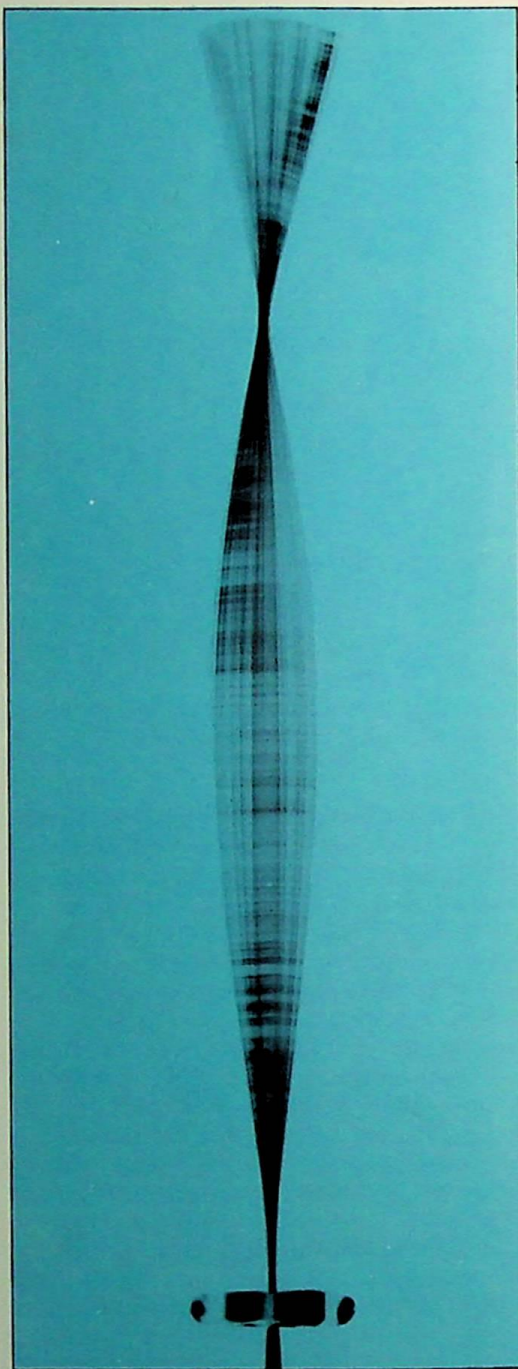
In an age of speed and mass communication, the concept of movement must be important to philosophers and scientists as well as artists. As soon as the Industrial Revolution got under way, artists began to be interested in moving subjects. Many writers have tried to draw parallels between the beginnings of mass production and the interest of the Impressionists in steam, moving crowds and racing horses.

The first unmistakable sign of an artistic concern with movement was the Futurist manifesto of 1910. The Futurists, all of them Italians, praised the City as a thing of great beauty and announced that phenomena like movement, power and energy need to be taken into consideration by artists attempting to be modern. A racing car was to them, as they said in a famous passage, more beautiful than the classical statue of the winged Victory of Samothrace.

Taking a lead from photography, they painted multiple images of their subjects in an attempt to reproduce movement within the static space of a canvas. This is what Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* of 1912 is doing, and what Balla's *Dog on a Lead* of the same year does. Boccioni's running man, which he called *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913), demonstrates the same idea in three dimensions. It is ironic that the Victory of Samothrace, which Futurists were so rude about, should have antici-

The Futurist Giocomo Balla attempted to create the illusion of movement by superimposing images one on top of the other. His *Rhythm of a Violinist* (detail) demonstrates his success.

pated the distorted forms of this sculpture by many centuries.

But the Futurists were not Kinetic artists. They never introduced *actual* movement into their work. In 1920 the brothers Pevsner, two Russian sculptors, issued a manifesto which announced the birth of Constructivism. Constructivism is a concept of sculpture very different from Futurism, but it in part derives from a similar concern with modern technology. Naum Gabo (he changed his name from Pevsner to avoid being mixed up with his brother) produced a kinetic sculpture powered by an electric motor in 1920, and in view of the fact that movement is a quality so stressed in the

Left, Naum Gabo's *Kinetic Sculpture, Standing Wave* was first exhibited in Berlin in 1922. The metal rod's high-frequency mechanized vibrations testify to his rejection of the static in art.

manifesto, it is perhaps strange that it remained for Gabo a unique experiment.

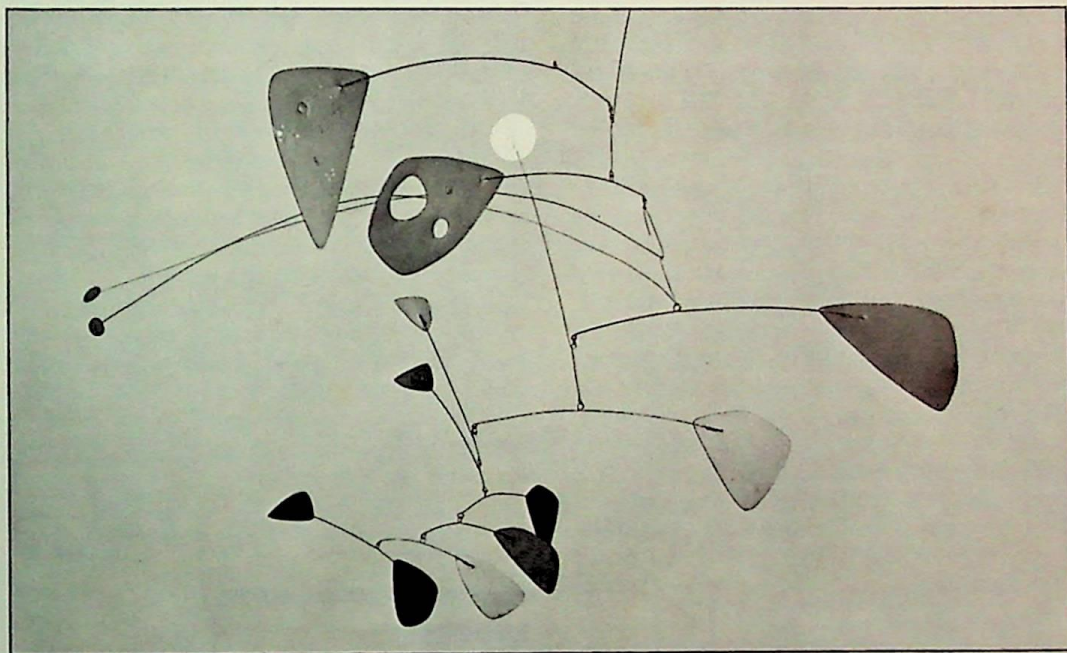
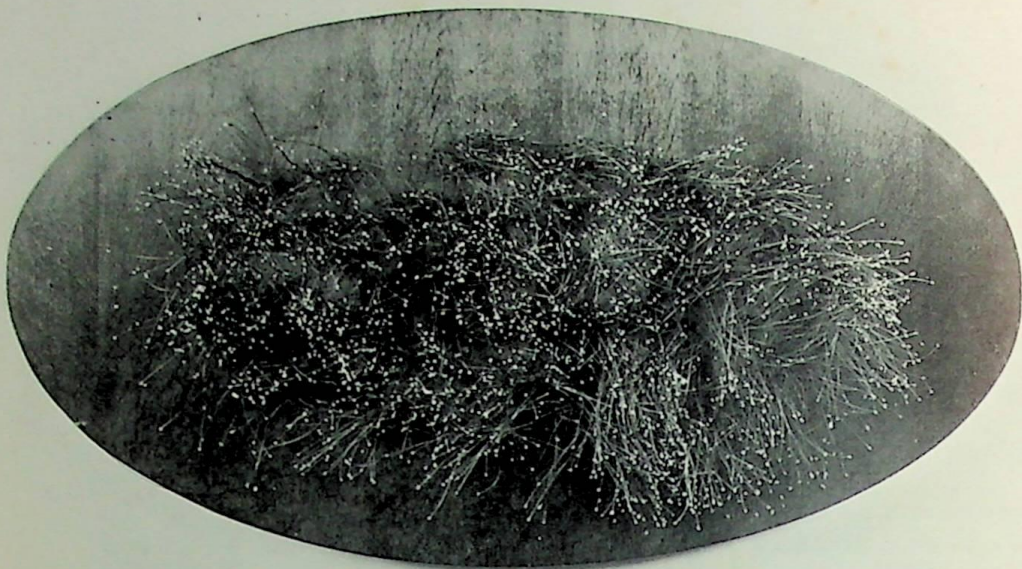
Moholy-Nagy, an astoundingly versatile Hungarian artist, made experiments in many art forms, mostly when he was a teacher at the Bauhaus, and he not only became convinced that movement was vital to art, but went about realizing his ideas in a thoroughgoing fashion. In 1922 he summed up his philosophy in the following way: 'We must substitute dynamics for the static principles of classical art.'

Moholy-Nagy not only wanted to create effects with movement, but also with light, and in 1930 he created a 'Light Display Machine' which was powered by a motor and had transparent and perforated parts. These controlled and manipulated various coloured lights. The results were far more beautiful and amazing than Moholy-Nagy had imagined.

A new range of materials

Movement is also used to great effect by the American sculptor Alexander Calder. Although from time to time he builds objects powered by motors he began in the 1930s to create 'mobiles' – a form of sculpture he invented. These are constructions of many separate elements, often of huge proportions, which are so finely balanced that the slightest breath sets them in motion and through a beautiful complex series of configurations.

The use of motors, of light and of balance and air are the basic elements in Kinetic Art. In the last ten years, the ideas of such

Antennae with Red and Blue Dots. With his wire-figure constructions Alexander Calder broke new, exciting ground. They are constantly moving through beautiful, complex configurations.

Julio le Parc's work is fundamentally experimental, but the ingenious structure, luminous mechanisms and subtle effects of his *Continuel-Mobile* transport the viewer into a magical world.

forerunners as Moholy-Nagy, Calder, Gabo and the Futurists have come together in a world-wide movement with centres in Germany (The Zero Group, Düsseldorf), France (Group for Visual Research, Paris) and in South America, particularly the Argentine. Many artists insist on working together, thus substituting the idea of co-operation for the old artistic notion of individuality. The materials used are many and various. Jesus Raphael Soto will use a spotlight to illuminate and, by warming the air, to set in motion polished metal plates hung at various angles on vertical strings, so that the spectator is surrounded by moving lights, some fast, some lingeringly slow. The Greek artist Takis uses rods of sprung metal which are then made to vibrate. Nicholas Schöffer powers machines with lights in them to cast ever-changing patterns in a multitude of colours on the walls around them. The Swiss artist Jean Tinguely is the humorist of Kinetic Art, collecting junk from a variety of sources, building it up to make very sophisticated mechanical machinery, which not only works but often actually destroys itself in a blaze of light and a variety of accompanying noises.

At the moment Kinetic Art is still in the experimental stage, even though many works of great beauty have been made. Op Art, which has tried in a similar way to extend art's horizons, is at a similar stage, and we can only wait to see what artists make of the discoveries made by Kinetic and Op artists. It is certainly a fruitful area for research.

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